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# DID SHE LOVE HIM?

## CHAPTER I.

### IN PARK LANE.

"SHE is the handsomest girl in the room!" exclaimed Tom Seymour emphatically.

"Bar one," replied his friend, smiling.

"Bar none, Stanley. Mabel Brooke is the dearest girl in the room—if not in all London."

"To you, of course; yet I agree with you that she is lovely."

"That fellow always wishes to monopolise too much of her time, though."

"He is only her cousin, Alf Foxley."

"A thorough fox in character," said Seymour, knitting his brows; "moreover, his position as cousin at times puts him a devilish deal too much in my way."

It was at a crowded ball, one of the last of a gay London season, and in one of those stately mansions about a musket-shot distant from the Marble Arch, that these remarks were made; and the speakers were Tom Seymour and Rowland Stanley, a captain of the Line, who, in the recess of a window, were glancing from time to time at their engagement-cards, watching the dancers, and confiding to each other their admiration for and their hopes concerning two of the fairest there; for they were bosom friends, great chums, had been schoolfellows at Harrow in former times, and though the professional avocations of the soldier often separated them, they always met again with emotions of strong regard for each other.

Both were more than average good-looking young fellows, of a type that is thoroughly and peculiarly English: Seymour was fair-complexioned and sanguine in temperament, with clear blue eyes; while Stanley was dark, his handsome face, like his neck, well browned by a tropical sun, was closely shaven, all save a smart thick brown moustache, while his curly pate was closely shorn to the regimental pattern, and, though in accurate full dress "mufti," there was no mistaking him for anything else than what he was, an easy-going and light-hearted young English officer.

"I see that your eyes follow Miss Allingham everywhere," said Seymour, laughing.

"Who is that fellow with whom she is dancing—I had almost said coquetting?" asked Stanley.

"Val Reynolds, of the Guards. He had the handsomest drag in the Hyde Park procession of the Four-in-Hand Club at the end of May last."

"Probably his chief recommendation in this world."

"To West-end mammas, especially," said Seymour, with the slightest bitterness of tone.

"He has all the self-assured look of a man about town."

"And on the occasion I refer to, his magnificent team of grays and his mode of handling the ribbons won him great applause. By the way, you rather affect the fair Allingham, I think."

Stanley's honest sunburnt face reddened slightly as he said:

"I have never made a secret of that to you, Tom."

"She is the greatest flirt in the room."

"Come, come, Tom, don't say so," said Stanley, giving his moustache an angry twirl.

"Fact, my dear fellow; I spent a month with her at Thaneshurst, Brooke's place in Sussex, and know how she dotes on admiration."

"A month! and yet, with all the facilities of a country-house, you did not fall in love with her?"

"You forget that Mabel Brooke was there," said Seymour, with something of sadness or irritation in his tone.

"Both girls are indeed beautiful," remarked Stanley; "(by the way, I have not yet seen her mamma to-night, the crowd is so great,) and if they seem so to all, what must they be to

*me,* who have so lately been among the brown women—the sallow Eurasians and the bleached Europeans of Hindostan."

And while the friends conversed thus, the dancers were whirling in the waltz under a flood of light from the crystal chandeliers, and the music of the quadrille band seemed to fill the whole of the great house with melody.

The object of Tom Seymour's admiration was one whom sensational novels would describe as a beautiful "being," yet she was a thoroughly practical little fairy, whose earthly name was Mabel Brooke, but the style of whose beauty it is difficult to describe. It was a sweet soft Saxon kind; the shape of her head, the grace of her neck and shoulders, the little tricks of manner with her "quick small hand" were all perfect, while her whole air was gentle, refined, and charming; but her wealth placed her upon a kind of throne or pedestal far above Seymour: he could only worship at a distance. A clerk in the City, well born but poor, he felt tongue-tied and helpless, yet that month at Thaneshurst had changed the whole current of his existence.

Her friend Milly Allingham was very different in bearing from Mabel. She was prouder in manner, more reserved at times, sometimes leaving gentlemen in doubt as to whether they had offended her. She was a dark-eyed beauty, with rich brown hair and features approaching the aquiline. She was stately and queenlike, or swanlike, in every action; thus these, all unstudied as they were, became somehow statuesque; yet her pride of bearing belied her, for she was not less child-like in grace or less warm-hearted and impulsive than her "gossip" Mabel Brooke.

They had an exceedingly schoolgirl plea for friendship and romantic affinity—the important facts of both being only daughters, and both having been born on the same day, though miles apart; for the hazel eyes of Milly first saw the light in her father's house at Hyde-park Corner; and the violet-blue orbs of Mabel somewhere nearer the sound of Bow Bells than her mamma cared to remember, now that she was Mrs. John Brooke, of No. — Park Lane, and of Thaneshurst in Sussex.

Both were girls of a highly-nervous temperament or sensitive nature; thus they were joyous, pliant, and kindly in

heart; they could feel sorrow and joy more keenly than many that were around them. Both were rather emotional; tears would well in their eyes at the relation of any deed of brilliant daring, any event of deep sorrow, a telling picture or a touching song. Such things as these sufficed to fill the hearts of both with soft sympathies and vague yearnings; but as yet life was all sunshine and a butterfly existence, a shadowless career, to Milly Allingham and Mabel Brooke.

On this night in particular the aspect of the stately house and all its surroundings chilled the ardour and unnerved the heart of Seymour; its long corridors with elaborate pilasters, coloured lamps, and encaustic tiles; the ceilings picked out in pink and gold; the soft carpets, the white bearskins, and tall Sèvres jars or Italian bronzes on marble pedestals; the crowded ballroom, with its West-end belles in all the glories of Swan and Edgar, and such suites of flashing jewels as Bond Street alone can produce; while from *jardinières* of ormolu, blue and gold, came the perfume of the hyacinth and rose, the violet and myosotis; and Tom sighed as he thought of his own abode in a shabby boarding-house in the vicinity of Harley Street; nor could the warm and honest greeting of his host, who shook him heartily by the hand, reassure him, though his father had been Mr. Brooke's oldest and dearest friend.

"Seen Mrs. Brooke yet, Seymour?" he asked.

The latter faintly said "No."

"This way—here she is."

And though Seymour had spent, on his host's invitation, some weeks at their place in the country, he approached Mrs. Brooke with extreme diffidence to-night.

"Martha, dear, our friend Tom Seymour," said the old gentleman to his ample better half, who was seated amid a group of matrons and chaperones; but "Martha dear" had resolved to seem only half-conscious of her young guest's presence or existence. She gave a barely perceptible movement of her head and a toss of her glittering fan, as much as to say:

"There, that will do; now you may go and join the dancers if you can get a partner."

Seymour felt that her greeting was only a kind of con-

temptuous snort, nothing more, and very different from the brilliant "company smile" she accorded to Reynolds, the tall Guardsman, and others, even to his friend Stanley, who now presented himself *pro formâ*. Lofty, proud, fat, flat-footed, and naturally imperious, all diamonds and satin without, and empty vanity and ambition within, how, thought Tom, had she ever such a daughter as Mabel?

And ere long she saw him join her daughter, little wotting that on her card sundry places had been specially kept vacant for *his* name; yet with all her cold pride of manner, Mrs. Brooke was a woman of good birth; the daughter of a very poor baronet, she had, as she thought, condescended in marrying John Brooke, the City man, to atone for which all her ideas and energies were concentrated on having a titled son-in-law; and how she succeeded or failed we shall see.

But though a City man in tone and temperament, her worthy spouse came of a good old English family, though he recked little of that; thus it was no ostentation to see their crest, a demi-seahorse, on everything, from the silver forks to the buttons of the well-matched footmen, when one could read that his ancestors had borne it on their helmets in many a French and Scottish war.

He had married later in life than most men usually do; he was very stout, with a bald head that shone like a billiard ball, fringed by a circle of silver hair; he had a bright, benevolent, cheery face, with several chins falling over his white necktie; and, indeed, with his amplitude of paunch, over which a vest was curving, he might have passed for the twin-brother of Mr. Mulberry, his own butler.

## CHAPTER II.

### WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

ABOUT the same time that Rowland Stanley claimed Miss Allingham, Seymour's heart had quickened when, in reply to his half-audible—"Our dance, I think, Miss Brooke?" Mabel put her arm through his, and gave him one of her pretty caressing smiles, which he felt very bewildering; and she smoothed her gloves on the prettiest of hands—a pair of the most delicate kids, a beautiful box of which she had thought-

lessly won from poor Seymour at the last University boatrace, when dark-blue and light-blue were all the rage, and balconies at Chiswick were at a premium, and Hammersmith Bridge rocked perilously beneath its living freight.

She seemed so happy and so bright as she leaned on the arm of her unacknowledged, or rather unavowed, lover—clinging to him, as it were, at times breathless, flushed, and fanning herself after their waltz—that who could ever imagine her future should be a dark one and full of tears!

"You will leave town soon now, I presume?" said he.

"In a week, I believe; but you will come again to Thaneshurst, of course, Mr. Seymour; but I fear you find our circle a dull one down in Sussex. Papa, though we live in a hunting county, cares nothing for horses; but studies the money-article in the *Times*, and talks only about 'Change and Mincing Lane, as if he still went to that odious office in the City, which, thank Heaven, I only know by name."

And thus she chattered on, amid the splendour and wealth that "odious" office had won her.

"The next waltz is ours," said a voice suddenly in her ear; and beside them stood her cousin, Alfred Foxley, who barely accorded the tips of his fingers to Seymour. Though gentle manly in bearing, and rather good-looking, he had a repulsive kind of twinkle in his gray-green eyes, and a cruel form of lip and jaw, which his sandy-coloured moustache and closely-clipped beard concealed. Mabel glanced at the embossed card which dangled at her fan, and said, with the slightest perceptible shade of annoyance:

"Excuse me, cousin Alf; my engagements with you are all over—my card is full."

"Already!"

"Of course; but there is little Fanny Conyers, and there are ever so many more."

"Bah! the Conyers girl always dances as if she had a stone in her hoof."

"Now, Alf, don't be horsey and cross too," said she, tapping him playfully with her fan; while Seymour's arm went round her waist, and they whirled away from her cousin's side, gliding out and in amid the maze to Strauss's noblest air.

With the keen eyes of that jealousy, "which makes the

food it feeds on," Alfred Foxley watched them ; he saw the secret interest in his cousin's heart for Seymour, or rather the preference she gave him. In a word, he did not love his cousin with all her beauty, but he loved her wealth, or the wealth which he knew must be hers in time to come. Aware how limited were the means of Tom Seymour, he did not fear, though he hated, him as a rival, and had but one idea—to ruin him in her estimation and that of every one else. He had long thought deeply over this, and he could see no possible plan to achieve his wicked end ; but there came a fatal season when to jealousy were added promptings of revenge to be gratified.

The rooms were becoming more full than ever. About midnight languid young swells from the Opera or their clubs came dropping in, with an air as if they were about to drop to pieces—with parted hair, faultless gloves, studs, and neckties—eyeing even the handsomest girls superciliously, or with a pretended patronising air of connoisseurship. So others now claimed the hand of Miss Brooke, and Seymour went in search of his chum Rowland Stanley, who had unwillingly relinquished *his* partner to the tall Guardsman, who had monopolised the proud beauty for more of the night than our Linesman quite relished.

He saw the long-legged hero with the parted hair bending over her in the pauses of the dance, and apparently talking to her with an *empressement* that inspired him with emotions the reverse of amiable, but which would have been soothed had he overheard that Reynolds was only boasting that he "belonged to the *old*, not the new Four-in-Hand Club, though they drove their teams together in unity on certain days."

Then, when Milly's face became brightly animated, and she seemed quite oblivious of his presence while listening to Reynolds, the latter was *not* pouring idle compliments or soft flatteries into her ear ; but as there had been a splendid *levee* that afternoon at St. James's—a collar-day, when the wearers of all orders were fully decorated—he was only detailing the appearance of some of the grandees he had seen while on duty with his troop ; and Milly Allingham, who was proud and ambitious by nature, and who dearly loved all connected with "Lords and ladies and Knights of the Gar-

ter," listened with her eyes beaming brightly; and then Stanley could only remember with anger that Reynolds was heir to a peerage, that he was a man of wealth, undoubtedly an eligible *parti*, and sufficiently good-looking to be a dangerous rival; moreover, that he had many facilities for meeting Milly Allingham, as she was always with Mabel; and Mrs. Brooke—having secret views of her own—fearless of exciting comment, gave him a seat in her carriage to every race, and a perpetual ticket to her box at the Opera.

So there were several wheels revolving within each other amid the well-bred hum of these drawing-rooms in Park Lane.

Rowland Stanley had no lack of partners, for a handsome and well-bred *militaire* is generally the best style of man in a young girl's eye; but when he failed to obtain Milly's hand, he seemed to care little for dancing at all. She liked his attentions, and she knew right well that he admired and probably loved her, for he had hovered about her during the whole season; but if he loved her, he never said so, even with his eyes. A hundred times had a tender avowal trembled on the lip of Stanley, who did not want for a certain amount of "modest assurance;" but there was always an undefinable something, of hauteur, of coldness and sudden reserve in her manner—a haughty carriage of her handsome head when she seemed, as it were, to crest up—that repelled him or checked him, even when his heart was full of adoration; for pride was the powerful and predominating trait in the character of the girl, whose secret heart—however serene and calm her exterior—was naturally true and warm, even to passionateness. Moreover, unlike his friend Seymour, Stanley was a man of means, and independent of his commission, but both men were as yet silent and unavowed lovers.

Though no expression of regard had fallen from Seymour—who had a nervous fear that to do so would end all between them—Mabel felt and knew instinctively that he loved her, and had a pleased consciousness that his eyes were admiringly bent upon her, watching her every movement. So even now, when she seemed to be floating in the waltz or galop with others, or threading her way with swan-like grace through double sets of the Lancers, his memory was wander-

ing away to the pleasant past time in Sussex—that brief country visit which was a kind of oasis in his arid City work-a-day life ; and what a crowding it was of remembered days and hours, and sentences half uttered and tender words arrested, in that brief space ; what memories of rides and rambles with her over the green breezy downs, where the brown rabbits peeped up from their holes ; by the ivied ruins of the old castle of Lewes, repeopling it anew with knights and dames ; or sketching it from the Battle Hill, where Henry III. was defeated by his barons ; of rowing on the Ouse, of picnics in the woods, and drives in the open carriage as far as Brighton, to watch the great billows come thundering against the walls of the Marine Parade, and to laugh at the bathers clinging to their safety-ropes as they bobbed in the white surf like fishermen's floats ; and together how they had strolled amid the wonders of the Aquarium, or sat side by side at the brilliant concerts in its crowded hall, listening to pretty Patti, or Titiens Queen of Song.

Then there were the promenades with the Cavalry-band ; and he pondered over the many opportunities he had for saying that which too probably, he should never dare to say—that she was all the world to him, and dearer than the breath of his nostrils ; and how hard to think that a day might come when he would have to congratulate her as the wife of *another !*

And he recalled their days of rink-skating at Ryde and Brighton, and the secret delight of guiding her hand-in-hand and supporting—yea, clasping—her, when she tottered or stumbled on her four-wheeled wooden skates ; and she did stumble so often when *he* was near—at least so he flattered himself. And among other memories came back an occasion when, out with the Brighton Harriers he clumsily got among them, and trampled ever so many to death at Pyecombe ; and on another, brought down a favourite nag of Mr. Brooke's, destroying two hundred guineas' worth of good horseflesh—on both events being stigmatised as " a duffing City clerk," and none sympathised with him, he knew, but gentle Mabel, who was aware that in both instances he had only been trying to keep near her and to take the flying-leaps at

the same time; but these were offences such as sporting men can never forgive or tolerate.

Would all this pleasant intercourse ever come to pass again?

On the occasion of his dancing with her for the last time that night, Mabel had seen her cousin Alfred bending over her mamma and whispering in her ear, while his eyes were bent upon herself; and it seemed to her—though it might be fancy—that the unpleasant phrase "Cad" reached her.

Now the result of this whispering soon took tangible form. Mrs. Brooke beckoned her daughter to the door of the conservatory, and said in a frigid manner:

"Pardon me detaining you for one moment, child."

"Yes, mamma."

"Show me your engagement-card. Here is that Mr. Seymour's name down for five dances out of twenty-one, and three of these are waltzes. You dance with him too often, Mabel."

"Mamma!"

"I will talk more to you of this matter to-morrow."

"What have I done that is wrong?" urged the girl.

"He is an ineligible *parti;* and when I was young, I neither wasted my time or my gloves by dancing with such. Your papa is stupid to bring such people about the house!"

Mabel only sighed to think that poor Tom Seymour was so nice and her mamma so openly sordid.

"These five dances," she continued, again examining the card, "you might have given to Captain Reynolds."

"But he only asked me for one, mamma; and why to him in particular?" said Mabel gently.

"My dear child, only think of his expectations; and even now he has a place in the country worth ten thousand a year, a hunting-box in Leicestershire, a moor in the Highlands, a yacht at Ryde, a fiord in Norway; and some say he will have a prairie soon, whereon you may shoot buffaloes!"

So Mabel thought, as she went back to her seat on her mamma's arm, that there was little doubt about it—her envious cousin *had* been taking an interest in her movements, and it was to Seymour the unpleasant epithet had been applied. So Mabel took refuge in a headache, and danced no more for the remainder of that night, or rather morning.

Seymour hovered by her side; but she almost feared to reply to his most commonplace remark, for she felt that the eye of her mother was upon her. She looked nervously down, and toyed with the camellias of a beautiful bouquet which had been sent to her that afternoon, she knew very well by *whom*.

At last the thinning of the crowd in the rooms, and the incessant roll of carriages, announced that the time had come to go: and Stanley and Seymour paid their adieux together.

"To-morrow you will be in the Row, as usual, I suppose, Miss Brooke?" said the latter, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, as usual, but for the last time—at noon," she replied in the same *sotto voce*, while she coloured slightly.

"How sadly the *last* time always sounds!"

"Pupkins takes our horses down by train the day after to-morrow."

"I shall take a canter in the Row, and—and perhaps may have the pleasure of seeing you. Good-night."

"Or morning, rather," said Mabel, smiling. "I can hear the birds singing in the Park. And you have enjoyed yourself?"

"More than language can express?" replied Seymour fervently, as he bowed himself out.

They separated; and though they seemed merely to shake hands as usual, Tom's heart was brimming with joy, so that he failed to detect the malevolence in the smile of Foxley, as he bade him farewell. He *had* overheard?

To meet to-morrow in the Row seemed, somehow, an appointment; but, to use his own phrase, matters were "less rosy" with Rowland Stanley. He had shawled and escorted to the carriage Miss Allingham, while Seymour looked after the chaperone, amid the hubbub of obstinate and imperious coachmen, cutting in and cutting out, thus causing much confusion, and occasionally some lively vituperation, with carriages interlocked and horses rearing.

"Whose beauty struck you most to-night, Captain Stanley?" asked Milly, with the most perfect unconsciousness.

"I dare not tell you," he replied in an agitated tone; and added hurriedly, "Will you give me the rosebud you wear in your breast?"

"Why?" she asked, smiling.

"That I may keep it for ever, in memory—of to-night!" he replied with genuine fervour.

"Oh, yes, if it will gratify you," said she, disengaging it from the corsage of her dress. She was in the act of presenting the trifle to her admirer, when, suddenly, she added, "I don't like these little bits of melodrama. Thanks, and good-night, Captain Stanley!"

And as the footman drew up the window, he saw that she had tossed the much-coveted flower, with a proud and petulant air, to the bottom of the carriage.

Stanley turned, and saw the tall Guardsman, Val Reynolds, in the act of lifting his hat to her, as, with a loose overcoat on, and an unlit cigar between his teeth, he came leisurely down the doorsteps.

"And because *his* eyes were upon us she cancelled her trifling favour!" thought Stanley, with a gush of jealous bitterness; "I am the greatest muff in the world to think of one so proud and volatile."

He stood still a moment, looking nevertheless, after her carriage, as, with many others, it rolled away towards the Marble Arch; and when Seymour joined him they lit their cigars, and walked leisurely away, comparing their notes as they walked by Stanhope Gate, and left behind them the noble Park, where the birds were carolling loudly, and where the soft air of the summer night was giving place to the chiller breath of early morning. Stanley's quarters were, for the time at his club; so he walked slowly homeward, thinking, with Sir Toby Belch, that "not to be abed after midnight is to be up betimes."

On the other hand, Seymour little knew that long after he had gone to dream, as he hoped, of Mabel, in his attic bedroom, and long after the windows of Park Lane and the waters of the Serpentine were shining in rosy light, that, oblivious of sleep, she had sat in her dressing-robe, after her sleepy maid had "done" her magnificent bright-coloured hair, before her toilet-table, oblivious too of its many rare treasures of jewelry, crystal bottles, and Sèvres china dishes, thinking of him, and of him only!

## CHAPTER III.

### IN THE ROW.

IT was about six o'clock on a July evening when the two friends turned their horses round the Marble Arch, and rode through Hyde Park. Stanley had, of course, his own horse—a thorough-going bay roadster, high in the forehead, round in the barrel, and deep in the chest; a kind of animal more difficult to find in perfection than even the hunter or racer; but Seymour had jobbed a hack from one of the many stables in the immediate vicinity of the abode wherein his limited salary compelled him to vegetate—a dull boarding-house, near Harley Street, inhabited usually by officers on leave, small annuitants, cranky old maids, or dubious widows, who, however, were most particular in displaying their marriage-rings.

As this is the usual time for "the Lady's Mile," the noble drive under the elms and lindens—all powdered with summer dust from Kensington Gore and Knightsbridge—was crowded with equipages; ranks of magnificent carriages were whirling past in lines—in many of them the loveliest women in the world, attired in costumes that London alone can produce. Some, however, were mounted (though the time was evening), and, attended by grooms or cavaliers, all on the most satin-skinned and irreproachable cattle, were careering along the soft and carefully made-up pathway of the Row. And all this was passing under a blaze of glorious sunshine, with a pleasant breeze rustling the foliage of the trees.

Though only half the extent of what it was in the days of Cromwell, or when old Evelyn saw the quartered bodies of the regicides borne, "cut, mangled, and reeking in baskets," from the place which is now Tyburnia, Hyde Park is still what Lord Chatham so happily characterised it as one of the greatest "lungs of the metropolis;" and it is strange, as Dr. Waagen says truly, "to fancy, in the midst of the vast town, the most verdant lawns, of very great extent, here and there adorned with picturesque groups of trees, broken by large pieces of water, and to complete the rural appearance, numbers of sheep and cows feeding on them; then fancy the striking effect of the great masses of architecture, such as

Westminster Abbey, rising in the distance above this verdant world." And here and there are dotted, over all these London parks, giant stems, gnarled and hollow, yet sprouting still, the ruins of old trees, that were old when a leper hospital occupied the site of St. James's Palace, and Whitehall had not been dreamed of.

Intent upon those of whom they were in search, the two friends rode somewhat silently and at an easy pace amid the brilliant throng that whirled in circles past them.

It was in the hope that Miss Allingham might accompany Miss Brooke, that Stanley had come with Seymour to the Park on this afternoon, though half despising himself for doing so, after her brusque action last night, prompted, as he believed it to be, by the presence of Valentine Reynolds. But a genuine love fit cures one of all pride in such cases. Stanley knew well that these fair friends were always coupled; that they rode and lunched, walked, shopped, and sung together, and together he hoped they would be on this occasion in the Row.

An occasional dropper-in on her mamma's reception days, five o'clock teas, &c., how often had he idled, cane and hat in hand, talking the veriest commonplaces to her, with his heart on his lips, and gone forth to count the days till he might, without exciting remark, venture to call again!

"You know, Tom," said he, "she reads every book I recommend, admires every passage I suggest to her criticism, sings every song I prefer, takes all the music and flowers I may offer; makes bets, and wins ever so many dozens of gloves; keeps places for me on her engagement-cards; even makes me *au fait* of the houses where she is sure to be; but somehow I make no further progress; there is at times something so deuced proud and stand-off about her. I love her very dearly, yet our intercourse has only the appearance of a danger's friendship—a mere flirtation."

"I would that I were on a footing so free and easy with Mabel Brooke," replied Seymour; "but flirtation often leads to something better, dearer, fonder, more lasting; and with such a girl a Milly Allingham, it is perilous work, Stanley—playing with edged tools, in fact."

The captain felt the truth of this, and rode on for a time in silence.

"To what a pitch—or low peg, rather—of folly and slavery does this girl's beauty reduce me!" thought he; "after all I have seen of the world, at home and abroad; all the women I have known, and all the risks and hardships I have undergone on service in India! Her loveliness allures, her pride piques, her coquetry maddens me, causing me almost at times to hate the chain that binds me. What strange idiosyncrasy of the human mind is this? There is a clever writer who affirms that 'it is quite possible to love and hate the same person, at the same moment;' that is, I suppose, to love, and writhe under—perhaps disdain oneself for—the bondage of the heart in which one is kept."

Amid his unuttered soliloquy, and just as he was resolving to steel himself against her—poor moth!—the pulses of his heart quickened painfully, yet joyfully, when Seymour exclaimed, "By Jove, here come the Brookes' carriage, and open too! Thank Heaven, the girls are alone, and the *mater* is not there."

And in a few seconds each had lifted his hat to his divinity, "the goddess of his idolatry," as they reclined back in the softly-cushioned carriage, in the prettiest of bonnets, and both smiling brightly under the fringe of her tiny parasol, and both looking as bright as the sunshine, though they had been—save in Mabel's instance—in every dance overnight; but, to be sure, their day had not begun till about one P.M. On her knee Milly Allingham had a flossy Maltese terrier, to Stanley's mind the most envied cur in London. As it was impossible for the carriage to stop just then, each wheeled his horse alongside of her he wished to address; and that Milly changed colour was very evident, when she saw Stanley; for undoubtedly he had become to her more than any one of those men whom, in the whirl of London society during the season, she was always meeting at one house or another, being in the "same set;" for Stanley, now on leave from his regiment, was in great request for everything, being as popular with the matrons of the land as with many of their marriageable daughters.

The ball of last night; the hopes that the ladies were not weary; the wind, the weather, and the chances of rain—all safe topics—were duly discussed with the earnestness

usually devoted to them ; and then it appeared as if the conversation was about to flag, till Mabel Brooke said :

" I am *so* glad, Mr. Seymour, that the season is over."

" Why ?"

" I have grown weary of gaiety—sick of what the world calls 'society,' and long now for the seclusion—if it can be called so in a house full of people—at Thaneshurst. You remember," she added, while her eyelids drooped, "how delightful it was there last autumn ?"

" Could I ever forget ?"

And as their eyes met, a glance was exchanged which conveyed a volume—ay, three volumes—and made poor Tom's heart leap within him.

" Oh, yes," added the girl sweetly, " I do love dear Thaneshurst. You must come and see us there Captain Stanley." (She spoke to the captain, but her eyes wandered to Seymour.) " You are quite a pet of mamma's. She " dotes on the military." Don't you see what a fuss she makes with Captain Reynolds ? We have always a pleasant houseful at Thaneshurst. In the old mail-coach or pre-railway times, when people dwelt contented in their own pretty village centres or circles, people could care for few——"

" And love, no doubt, but one and one only," interrupted Milly Allingham.

" And now we can know, care for, and even love ever so many. We live in pleasanter times than those of our jog-trot ancestors."

Tom Seymour smiled at the girl's vivacity ; but thought, with a sigh, that in the frugal days referred to, wealth perhaps might not have throned his divinity so far beyond his, reach. Perhaps some such ideas were floating in the mind of Mabel ; she feared to extend to him the half-invitation so glibly given to his friend ; and as this was, too probably, the last day on which she should see him, she could not help looking at him with something of sadness and interest.

There is no doubt that Seymour was as handsome a young fellow as one may see anywhere. His fair brown hair started in sprouts from his fine and thoughtful forehead like the locks of a Phidian Jove ; he had kind, gentle, and loving eyes—especially when they met *hers ;* a pleasing smile and good-

humoured mouth, yet he was generally, perforce of circumstances, grave; and he had a rich baritone voice that every one admired, save Mrs. Brooke, whose patience could not stand his concerted duets and pieces with her daughter Mabel.

The eyes of these two conveyed much to each other, though their lips uttered little.

Meanwhile another "little game" was being acted on Stanley's side of the carriage, when Miss Allingham, with a half-blush in her usually pale cheeks, said suddenly:

"I was pettish to you last night—even rude I fear; so now forgive me by accepting this little flower from my bouquet to-day."

It was a rosebud with some sprigs of forget-me-not.

Stanley murmured his earnest thanks as he placed it in his button-hole, and thought, perhaps a little bitterly, "She gives me this small trifle because *he* is not here!" But this emotion was only momentary. The trivial episode, the little gift so prettily given, the tone of voice, the half-timid expression in the usually proud face and clear well-opened eyes, all lifted Stanley's heart to the seventh heaven; and long after in fancy he conned and dreamed and acted it all over again, and remembered that when he had said, "Thank you—thanks, a thousand times," and gently touched her gloved hand, it was *not*—as it had been on two previous occasions—hastily withdrawn, for he was somewhat of a Grandison in his love-making. But now the throng was so great that they could no longer accompany the carriage, which bowled on its way, without the horsemen; but, as the latter lifted their hats and drew their reins, Seymour saw—or fancied that he saw—an expression in the farewell smile of Mabel that he never forgot.

They had scarcely separated when Alfred Foxley, mounted on a fine grey horse, rode slowly past in close attendance on the tiniest of broughams, wherein sat a fair one with golden locks, whom nobody seemed to know, yet all, or most, knew her perfectly well as Miss Aimée de Bohun, the handsomest ballet-girl in town as her *carte de visite* was scattered broadcast over all London to such an extent that one might think her whole time was passed in sitting to photographers.

She had a handsome salary, yet the initiated knew that

the sealskin jackets in which she came to rehearsal, the diamonds that sparkled on her fingers, the rare bouquets of Ninfa Egeria camellias white as snow that awaited her at the stage-door, like the cases of cliquot that were sent her, and the dinners she gave at the Trafalgar or Star and Garter to her theatrical friends, to Val Reynolds and certain other languid and magnificent beings of the male sex, were not the produce of her fascinating fandangos and *pas seuls*.

Perhaps it was some knowledge of this that made Foxley colour with vexation when he passed Stanley, but more especially his rival Seymour, as he had given Mabel to understand over-night that he was going to see the Blues and Hussars play at polo at Lillie Bridge in the evening.

They exchanged a meaning smile as they left the Park by the Albert Gate, very well satisfied with their interview —Seymour more especially. It had been something so like a rendezvous; and if Mabel had seen her cousin, as he did not doubt she must, the escort duty on which he was employed would not raise *him* much in her estimation.

"Stanley," he suddenly exclaimed, "I would give all I have in the world——"

"All you *owe* would, perhaps, be better still."

"Perhaps so."

"But for what, my boy?"

"One kiss of that girl's hand ere she leaves London!"

"She goes by the first down train at noon to-morrow," was the captain's matter-of-fact reply to his friend's outburst.

Tom might never have the little privilege so coveted yet he had a kind of assurance in his heart that, but for her parents' pride, and more especially her mother's ambition, the wealthiest bachelor of the season had not such a chance of success with *her* as he had; and he thought that, with Mabel for a helpmate, what a long and delicious idyl life would be!

Stanley too had his own happy thoughts born of Milly's gift; the gift and the act were but a trifle, yet "trifles make the sum of human things."

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE FATEFUL HOUR.

IN three days after this the well-known mansion in Park Lane was silent, shut up, and empty of all inmates, save the respectable old female who was left as custodian thereof. Brown holland covered everything; even the chandeliers were wreathed in bags, and statues looked spectral in their unwonted shrouds. The blinds were all down; the shrubs and flowers, with their huge majolica vases, removed from the balconies to the conservatory.

Ichabod! the glory had departed from Park Lane; yet Tom Seymour could not but come now and then to survey the place which had once been as an enchanted palace to him, and where he knew the very windows of the room that was Mabel's bed-chamber.

As he was not on Mrs. Allingham's visiting list, he could only hear of the Brookes at secondhand through his friend Stanley—and more especially of Mabel, who was the constant correspondent of Milly; so to Tom Seymour the days—more especially those of office drudgery—stole monotonously, wearily, and anxiously on, and lover-like—circumstanced as he was—he tormented himself by fears and fancies that were not illumined by hope.

Who might be resident with her at Thaneshurst now, ingratiating himself with her, and supplanting him in her heart with all the opportunities afforded by propinquity and residence in a country-house; backed perhaps by wealth and "expectations," and abetted, as he would then doubtless be, by her parents' influence and authority? Would the memory of the delicious past time, in the same place, act as a charm to protect his love and keep his image in her mind? He could but hope so; yet this rival whom his imagination conjured up was a perpetual source of torment to poor Tom, more especially in the lonely evenings he spent in his dull rooms at the corner of Harley Street, more than half the houses of which were closed for the season; fate and fortune were, he felt, against a lover whose pockets were so thinly lined as his; and in the present instance he had not "that

limitless reversion in the *future*" which is worth the mines of Golconda to the young and ardent.

Of Alfred Foxley, the cousin, who had also gone down to Thaneshurst, he had no fear whatever. He envied the apparently free-and-easy position in which his friend Stanley stood with Miss Allingham; but marvelled that, with the many recommendations possessed by the latter—monetary ones especially—he seemed to make so little progress in his love affair with her; but then, somewhat of a coquette as she was, Milly was in no haste to choose, or strike her colours to the gallant officer in question.

From Reynolds the Guardsman, Stanley one day heard incidentally that the Allinghams were on the eve of leaving town. He thought it strange that Milly should give this information to that tall personage with the tawny fly-away whiskers, and yet say nothing on the subject to himself; however, he made up his mind to call at once.

The commissionaire on permanent duty at the club hailed a passing hansom, and Stanley was soon bowled up St. James's Street, along Piccadilly and Park Lane, and in due time found himself at Connaught Terrace. A resplendent footman, with a head like a cauliflower, was benignantly contemplating mankind at the portico of Mrs. Allingham's house, and from this official Stanley learned that the mamma was "hout" and that Milly was at "'ome."

"There is one fateful hour in every man's existence," says a novelist; and while his heart began to beat quicker with anticipation, Rowland Stanley began to hope or to flatter himself that his hour had come *now*. He had not often such an opportunity as this.

"Is Miss Allingham alone?" he asked.

"Quite alone, sir," responded "Jeames," preceding him; and now there flashed upon his mind the memory of another occasion, when he was on the point of declaring himself, and putting his fate to the issue at once. It was at a whitebait dinner at Greenwich, when together they were on a balcony of the hotel, with none near, watching the passing ships and steamers gliding amid the strange combination of lurid light, gray mist, and purple shadow that mark a London twilight evening by the river, and he was on the point of telling her

how dear she was to him—nay, had taken possession of her gloved hand; but after permitting it to linger for a little moment in his, she withdrew it, gathered her shawl about her, and stepped laughingly back into the drawing-room, so the golden chance was past and gone!

But an opportunity had come again, and even as he ascended the stately staircase, with all that rapidity of thought which enables us to form a fancied future, he cast up the general amount of his income, the statement he might have to give to "mamma," his ultimate expectations, his scheme for selling out, of quitting his beloved regiment, of taking a leaf out of *All for Love, or the World well Lost*, settling down with to her Milly Allingham, and devoting his existence to her, and to her only.

So intently was she engaged with her own thoughts—it could scarcely be with her music, as she was only idling over the keys—that she did not hear his name announced; and through the double drawing-room he made his way unheard on the soft carpet and occasional bearskins, seeing himself reproduced again and again in the endless perspective of the gilt-framed pier-glasses that rose from marble console tables and chiffoniers, littered with Sévres, Wedgwood, and ornaments of all kinds; and round the central table, where, of course ranged in regular order, lay elaborately bound tomes, photographic albums, silver baskets of calling cards, and gilded books, to be opened sometimes, but never perused—the usual features of that which some one describes as the "peculiar institution, the British drawing-room, that sacred chamber, ever tenderly swept and garnished and cared for."

Stanley, unheard, the servant having withdrawn, came close to her back, as she was seated on the music-stool, and for a moment he could admire, with all a lover's tenderness, the graceful contour of her neck and shapely head, and her wonderful coils of hair, of a brown so rich and dark, and yet so subtly shot with gold when the light struck them, that she almost seemed to have tresses of two colours at once. But if the girl a man loves is always beautiful in his eyes, how much more must she seem so when her loveliness is—as Milly's was—acknowledged by all, her own sex as well as the other!

Rapid though Stanley's survey was, he could perceive that

a piece of music given by Reynolds—a piece with a tenderly significant title—was obnoxiously prominent on the piano; but then others of his presentation were littered all over it. Of course Miss Allingham had many more admirers than Captain Reynolds; and no man objects to it, but is rather pleased that the woman he loves obtains the admiration of others, such an expression being an approval of his own good taste; yet, somehow, Stanley had a decided dread of the influence of the Guardsman in the mansion at Hyde park Corner.

Suddenly she became aware of his presence, gave a little start, and, while colouring for a moment, presented her hand, and said with a smile:

"Captain Stanley! Where have you come from? Up through the floor, as the spiritualists send people?"

"In by the door, in the usual orthodox way," replied Rowland Stanley, drawing a chair near her; "but I fear I have disturbed you."

"Oh, do not say so. I was only thinking, or idling over a piece of music," she replied, and with a rapid movement tossed Val Reynolds's last gift into the music-stand, either out of carelessness for that personage or lest her visitor might see it.

"Your mamma's reception days are over now," said he after a brief pause.

"For the season, yes; even the kettledrums—the mildest of all forms of dissipation—are over now."

"But having heard that you were on the eve of leaving town, I ventured to call."

"Every one has left town now but ourselves. I am literally 'the last rose of summer,'" she replied, laughing. "Mamma is shopping, making some farewell purchases; she will be so disappointed on finding that she has missed you. But *who* told you that we were on the eve of departure?"

"Reynolds of the Guards.

"Indeed! Yes, mamma goes with an aunt of mine to the Hôtel du Rhin at Wiesbaden, to imbibe the *kochbrunnen;* I to the Brookes' down in Sussex, for a pretty long visit."

"Then probably this is the last time I shall have the pleasure of seeing you."

"Till we return to town. We leave this in a few days."

"So soon! When you return to town, Miss Allingham, I shall of course have joined my regiment abroad."

The girl's long dark lashes drooped, and then she gazed at him with something of interest in her hazel eyes.

"Abroad?" she repeated, and there was much that was musical and plaintive in her voice as she spoke.

"Yes; so Heaven knows when—if ever—we may meet again; so I have that to say which must be said now—now, that we are on the eve of what may be more than a temporary separation."

His lips trembled, his eyes were sparkling, and his heart beating fast; but he paused even then, for something in the girl's serenity, her air, or assumed air, of pride, contrasted with his own emotion and loving tenderness, made him linger on the declaration of the sentiment she had inspired. After a little pause, during which he could see how her heart palpitated beneath her silk dress, he laid a hand softly upon hers, and said, in a low voice and with his lips very near her pearly ear:

"You—you know that I love you!"

"I do not know anything of the kind, Captain Stanley," replied the wilful beauty, looking down, however, and leaving her hand where it lingered on the keys of the piano.

"Milly, dearest Milly—oh, permit me to call you so!" he urged, and now his breath was on her cheek.

"Captain Stanley," she replied, "please not to carry flirtation too far."

"Flirtation!" he exclaimed almost impatiently, while to hide her smile of pleasure she buried her pretty nose in a bouquet of camellias and lily of the valley that lay near in a charming *bouquetière*, the gift of Stanley, with a bouquet, one night before a ball. "Oh," he continued, "have I deceived myself? Can you—have you been unconscious of all this, of how deeply I love you?"

In her heart of hearts Milly Allingham had seen his growing passion, and felt a real pleasure in his society, but had sedulously hidden her secret pride thereat; and, almost unconscious of her own coquetry, her vanity was piqued by the long delay of the avowal that had come now. Thus she was

unwilling to surrender on too easy terms; or, perhaps, could it be that she was like an angler, anxious to play a little with her fish ere she landed him; or that she had another string to her bow, and knew not her own mind? Any way she paused and Stanley repeated in a more agitated voice:

"Can you have been unconscious of how deeply I love you?"

Prompted by motives best known to herself, keeping her beautiful face half averted, and showing him only her clearly cut profile, she answered in a low voice:

"I certainly never dreamed that you had a deep feeling on the subject; and—and you red-coats have such a facility for such emotions. I thought you—you——"

"What?"

"Valued me as a friend, nothing more."

Some strange idiosyncrasy of the heart led her to trifle with him and with her own happiness. Stanley sighed, and said:

"Oh, Miss Allingham! your society has ever been delightful to me; but——"

"Please let us be friends. Many love, and love truly; but many more only fancy they have fallen in love, and the fancy does not outlast separation from the object—separation for any length of time. We can be excellent friends can't we?" she added, looking up at him for a second with a timid but coquettish smile.

Stanley had risen now, and looking down at her stately head, with its straight snow-white division he thought sadly:

"Is she heartless, or merely equivocating with me?"

Then he added aloud:

"A friend of yours! a mere cold friend I could never, never be. I must be something nearer and dearer. I must be all, or nothing!"

She was only waiting, perhaps, to hear him say passionately again how much he loved her, as doubtless the repetition thereof was pleasing alike to her ear and her vanity; but in this she was doomed to be disappointed; for, just as Stanley was about to speak again, the door of the room swung noiselessly open, and the tall footman with the powdered hair, bearing

certain cards, solemnly and portentously, on a silver salver, announced some visitors, whose silken dresses were already rustling on the threshold. So Stanley was compelled to retire, leaving the citadel untaken, and assuming his hat and cane, bade her sadly, reproachfully, and even hastily, farewell.

She rang the bell, and he bowed himself out.

He issued into the brilliant sunshine, passed the Marble Arch, and entered the Park with a vague sense of being ill-treated or of having acted foolishly; but how he knew not exactly. He had not been abrupt or impetuous, yet he had been refused, and not even referred to her mother. The whole love scene had taken a turn, and been in its tone quite unlike what he could have anticipated, and he knew not whether to thank or maledict the sudden irruption of those fair visitors whose arrival prevented a continuance of it.

So Stanley's *fateful hour* had not yet come.

While he was sauntering moodily onward she was concealing her real agitation by talking gaily to her friend Fanny Conyers and others, on topics far removed from her heart, while she whispered to herself, with a bright and triumphant smile :

" He will come again ere we go, and *then* I may give him some hope."

But Milly Allingham was wrong ; for Rowland Stanley went near Connaught Terrace no more ; and a few days after the stately mansion there was, like all the rest, shut up, abandoned to brown holland and cobwebs. After she and her mamma had left town, he thought he had obtained a clue to the whole affair, and to the secret emotions which influenced her while listening to his declaration.

One day, when idling over the papers at the club, and pondering how aimless his life in London had now become, he overheard one officer say to another :

" So Val Reynolds has gone on leave and run down to Sussex—to some place beyond Brighton at least—for some weeks."

" Indeed !" replied the other, not much interested in the subject.

" He spoke of the Brighton Harriers, but Foxley told me there is a bit of muslin in the case."

"Ah—perhaps."

"He was more particular in his choice of gloves in Regent Street, and pots and bottles of all kinds of things at Rimmel's, the day before he went. Some of the Blues quizzed him openly, as he is known to be awfully spoony on Milly Allingham, who is residing near Brighton."

"She *is* no end of a nice little party, the Brooke girl," said the other, becoming a little interested, "but not equal to Milly Allingham; but then her mother spoils all by showing her cards so plainly."

"How?"

"Don't you know?—tuft-hunting to death. She pays profound homage to the peerage, though she despises the Law List—perhaps the Army List in general too. And so Val, you think, has gone after *la belle* Allingham?"

"Yes; the Brookes' invitation to her included him, I understand. But with all his recommendation, Reynolds makes little way with some women."

"Why?"

"He can only talk Four-in-Hand Club, and dilate largely on bars and bits, of patent axles and ditto drags, and laugh immensely at any fellow who pulls up his team with both hands."

But here Stanley, unwilling to listen to more, took his hat, and, buttoning his gloves as carefully as if he had nothing serious to reflect on, issued into the now-deserted thoroughfare of Pall Mall, where little more was to be seen save the dust whirling, and the sentinels of the Guards standing motionless on their posts with "ordered arms."

"Brookes' invitation to her included *him?*" thought Stanley. "Neither said anything of this to *me.*"

A pang of jealousy, with something of bitterness, of wounded self-esteem and anger, for supposed duplicity, shot through his heart. Was there a secret understanding between them? The whole affair wore a disgusting aspect of prearrangement. That Miss Allingham did not speak of Reynolds going down to Thaneshurst was perhaps an omission; perhaps she thought or cared too little about the matter to mention it; but it might also be that she was too well-bred, too coquettish, or—shall we say it?—too cunning

to pain *him*, Rowland Stanley; or perhaps—and this was the most stinging thought of all—she might really care for the "curled darling."

Ay, there was the rub. So Stanley gave a sigh like a snort, and muttered,

"Well, it is all for the best, as Dr. Pangloss has it; but just now the wrench is devilish hard to bear. By Jove, I'll cut London, resign my leave, and rejoin!"

But he did not do this for reasons to be given shortly; not that he cared much about the mess-table speculation of a man having twelve months' leave, after long foreign service foregoing at least five or six of them.

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## CHAPTER V.

### WHAT OCCURRED AT "THE RAG."

THE month of August in London, there the hottest, most breathless, and detestable of all the months in the year, stole on, and found Rowland Stanley still lingering irresolutely in town, doubtful whether to rejoin or take a run over to Paris. The West End was intensely dull; still he preferred it to the country, after his long residence among some of the outlying hill-stations in India. Even the theatres were cheerless now. The railways failed to fill them, and the dress-circles presented "a beggarly account of empty boxes."

In short, London was out of town.

"I must cut this stupid objectless life," thought Stanley; "I'll rush off somewhere, or rejoin. By Jove! but for what those gossipping fellows at the club said about Val Reynolds, I would go down to Brighton, where I might have some chance of seeing her on a fête day. And only to think that devilish fellow has been with her at Thaneshurst all this time."

August! Milly Allingham had left town in July. By this period, what other interests than his might surround her now, to the oblivion of his image and memory perhaps!

Stanley had loved the girl from the time he first saw her; but with her strange caprice and coquetry he sometimes asked himself *why* he did so? And he was questioning himself thus now, even while collaterally, in his own mind,

recalling and dwelling fondly and sadly over every word that had passed between them.

In six or seven weeks, he surmised, could she have reached the apathy, the indifference, that so often follow separation? and something of rage gathered in his heart at this idea, combined with his suspicion of a secret understanding. For often does love, or so-called love, come to this, when without the magnetic influence of presence and propinquity. If she remembered him, would she care to surmise—but she was too proud to do so—whether he thought of *her?* Often he had heard her say, laughingly, that the memories of men, in matters pertaining to love, were wonderfully short—an accusation against the sex which he as laughingly, but for obvious reasons more earnestly, combated.

At times it seemed painfully plain to an unostentatious fellow like Rowland Stanley that Milly Allingham, the haughty and wealthy beauty, who shot her arrows so deftly, and posed herself so gracefully at archery meetings—who was the belle of the best London ball-rooms, the talk of the season, the admired and looked-for in the Row and elsewhere—who had been presented at court—who shone in the croquet-ground, aud actually hunted on a thoroughbred—was much more likely, after all, to prefer the languid die-away, tawny-whiskered Guardsman, to one like himself; and so, as he thought over his situation, he muttered,

"What a romantic—yes, sentimental—idiot I was to ask her for the flower after the Brooke's ball; and to prize so much the rosebud and the—what was it?—bunch of forget-me-nots she gave me next day in the Park! On the very verge of proposing, too, when last I saw her!"

These ideas came to him in his bitter moments, for it was

> "his jealousy's peculiar nature
> To swell small things to great; nay, out of naught
> To conjure much; and then to lose its reason
> Amid the hideous phantoms it had formed."

And thus he conjured much. That Reynolds's invitation to Thaneshurst was due to Mrs. Brooke's particular and ulterior views and his own great "expectations," Stanley knew very well; but it was the concealment of it from himself by Milly Allingham that rankled in his heart, though he had no

decided claim as yet to be in her confidence. From what motion did that concealment spring? he asked himself a thousand times, without finding any satisfactory solution of the mystery.

So every way Stanley felt town becoming more intolerable: like the jealous Moor, he found his "occupation gone." There was no more escorting Mrs. Allingham and her daughter to balls and evening parties, to flower-shows at the Horticultural, to the International Exhibition, or fêtes at the Botanic Gardens, and elsewhere. All was ended now, and blank monotony had fallen over him apparently ; and in this mood he found himself promenading one evening in Regent Street, when he suddenly came upon his friend Tom Seymour.

The office of the latter was a Government one; certain returns had been moved for in "the House," and in the making up of these he had been occupied in other work than reading periodicals and smoking cigars during office hours; and thus Stanley had not seen him for some time.

After a few of the usual commonplaces Stanley asked Tom if he had heard anything of the Brookes.

"No; have you?" asked the other eagerly.

"Only that Milly Allingham has gone to visit them, while her mater is imbibing the kochbrunnen at Wiesbaden," replied Stanley, and then changed the subject, as he had no desire to impart, even to his firm friend, the "snub"—for such he deemed it—he had received from Milly, and too sincerely mortified to say aught of the cloudy-looking affair of Reynolds being invited at the same time to the same house.

"They will make a long stay at Thaneshurst, I fear," said Seymour, unwilling to let the matter nearest his heart be dismissed so summarily ; and there was something of sadness or weariness in his tone that impressed his military friend.

"Now, Tom, old fellow," said the latter, "you are down in the mouth just now about Mabel Brooke. You'll dine with me this evening?"

"With pleasure ; but where?"

"At my club. I sha'n't be there long now ; I mean to rejoin the regiment."

"Leave up already?"

"Not half run."

"Why—oh, I see! Milly Allingham is out of town, so London has lost its charm. It has so for me too."

"Come, then, we'll just have a cutlet or so, a bottle of Lafitte after, and then go somewhere and make a night of it."

"Thanks, Rowland. Anywhere—much less your luxurious club—is preferable to that odious boarding-house by Harley Street."

And they turned arm-in-arm down Pall-Mall way, little foreseeing the direction their affairs would take at the club, where they were soon seated at table in the snug corner of a stately room. A gorgeous footman, resplendent with buttons, removed the silver lid of the soup-tureen, and Stanley pushed the *menu* to his friend. "A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind;" but though the captain and Seymour had not much to say on any subject save one, as their minds were at Thaneshurst, and on that subject they could not converse until their attendant's services were dispensed with, haste was made to get through the "cutlet," &c., and have the cloth removed.

"Port or claret, Tom?"

"Claret, please. And so where shall we go for the evening?"

"Haymarket? Sothern is there as Dundreary, of course? Or shall we go and see Foxley's friend, little Aimée de Bohun, pirouetting on her toes at the—"

"No; Foxley is sure to be in a private box, and I detest the sight of the fellow's face," exclaimed Seymour.

"Letter for you, sir," said the servant, holding a salver before Stanley, who leisurely took therefrom a letter, the postmark on which made him start and change countenance.

"Lewes and Brighton, by Jove!" he exclaimed; "and addressed in a lady's hand too."

"A lady's!" repeated Seymour, suddenly becoming similarly interested.

"Yes. See, it must be so."

"Mabel's!" exclaimed Seymour, his colour deepening more than the Lafitte warranted.

"You know it, I perceive."

"Open it, Rowland—I am all impatience."

Stanley opened it carefully with his fruit-knife, and a little

nervously he drew the missive from its envelope. It *was* from Miss Brooke; and her tinted letter-paper, redolent of some subtile perfume, was a rare work of heraldic art, so far as arms, monogram, and so forth went.

"What on earth can she be writing to *you* about, Stanley?" asked Tom as he saw an expression of pleasure spread over the face of his friend, who read aloud thus:

"Thaneshurst, Sussex.

"Dear Captain Stanley,—I write to you by desire of papa, as his hand is gouty, and Alf has delayed so long to do so, though more than once requested. The grouse are not so plentiful this month; but papa, though no shot himself, says that there is an excellent prospect for the partridge-shooting, and that if you can visit us in time for the 1st of September, we shall all be delighted to see you.

"We are not so gay just now as we sometimes are; but we contrive to get through the time wonderfully—Milly, Fanny Conyers, and some other girls, with our escorts, Alf and Captain Reynolds."

"Is *he* there?" asked Seymour, interrupting.

"So it would seem," replied Stanley, as if he had only then learned the whereabouts of this tall bugbear to them both.

"That must have been the old lady's doings."

"Of course. He'll be a peer one of these days."

"We have carpet-dances," continued Stanley, resuming the letter, "and music every evening, and sometimes private theatricals and charades. We were all at a great musical party, which proved very jolly, as we had previously been bored by a lecture on Africa by a mild clerico, our new curate, who seems to have eyes for no one save Milly, but he may as well admire the moon. She is quite the rage with the Hussars at Brighton. They gave us a ball last week, and we danced every dance, and in the sets of sixteen Lancers. Captain Reynolds quite shook off his aristocratic langour, and became our commanding officer for the time. It was delightful: we all laughed so, and wished you were there."

"No regret for poor me!" sighed Tom.

"We often drive to Brighton, and skate there on the rink with cousin Alf and Major Larkspur of the Hussars. But you must join us in all these mild amusements, if you are not otherwise engaged.

"Pater and mater join me in kindest regards, and believe me to be yours very sincerely, MABEL BROOKE."

"And that is all?" exclaimed Tom.

"There is a P.S.: 'Papa desires me to add that if Mr. Thomas Seymour (who is the son of one of his oldest friends) can obtain leave from his official duties, he'—(the word had at first been *we*)—'shall only be too happy if he can accompany you.'"

Seymour's face grew suddenly very bright and joyous, while an emotion of gladness filled his heart; yet he only said:

"How kind! But he is a fine fellow, old Mr. Brooke."

Mabel, circumstanced as they were, could not write to Seymour even such a girlish and light-hearted letter as this, though she might do so with confidence to his friend, knowing well that her letter would be shown. Indeed, it was at her suggestion the invitation was given to Stanley when her father was alone, in the hope—which was fulfilled—that, by the association of ideas, it would be extended to his friend.

"You are going, of course, Tom?" said Stanley.

"Doubtless; shall only be too happy. And you?"

There was somewhat of a dark and dubious expression hovering on Stanley's handsome face. He was thinking:

"To go down there, and find perhaps that—*after all*—she has fooled me, and thrown me over for that fellow Val Reynolds—no, I'll be——if I go!"

And yet the next breath found him considering the terms in which he should express his pleasure in accepting Mr. Brooke's invitation.

But with all his love for Milly, he was not without an emotion of anger at her pride and coquetry. Thus one moment he was prompted to show his indifference of her society by pleading other engagements, and the next felt only too glad to avail himself of the opportunity of once more enjoying and tormenting himself in it.

Poor Tom looked longingly at the letter of Mabel; *her* hand had written, touched, folded, and closed it—the lovely little hand whose contour he knew so well—and something of this was read in his face by Stanley, who said:

"There, Tom, is the letter; I know you wish to preserve it as a relic. What idiots we fellows are!"

"'Is love so small a thing in comparison with money?' asks Mrs. Norton."

"Yes, at times, Tom—a very small thing indeed."

Seymour smiled somewhat bitterly and said,

"So cousin Alf delayed—that means, no doubt, declined—to write an invitation which was perhaps intended to include *me*."

"Doubtless. But don't think of him; you could easily turn his flank. I would that I had in Miss Allingham's heart the same amount of interest you possess in that of her friend."

"And that I had the same monetary advantages that you have to recommend you, Stanley."

"Milly sets no store on these. Can you get leave from your commanding officer?"

"Our comptroller? Oh yes; the returns are finished, and I have fairly earned it."

"Good. Then I'll write by an early post to-morrow, and accept for us both. Meantime we'll have another bottle of Lafitte."

Seymour was quite elated as his mind went back to the delights of his first visit to Thaneshurst; but he knew well—he had learned intuitively of old—that however warm and genuine his welcome from cheery old Mr. Brooke would be, that of Mrs. Brooke would be accorded most unwillingly. With all his efforts he could never win her favour, and had ceased to hope for it or make further attempts.

Yet the temptation to be once again near her he loved rendered him oblivious, case-hardened, and almost totally indifferent to what her mother thought; so he resolved the moment he reached his rooms to write also an acceptance to Mr. Brooke.

Thus they got through the night pleasantly without going anywhere—even to see Aimée de Bohun, the fair one with the golden locks, in tartalan and spangles.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THANESHURST.

THOUGH situated amid a portion of Sussex scenery where the landscape is broken into hill and dale, and for the most part covered with birch, hazel, or beech underwood, Thaneshurst is still within view of that restless sea which is for ever rolling between the white bluffs of Beachy Head and the peninsula of Selsea Bill.

*Thaneshurst!*—the ancient sound of the name pleased the vanity of Mrs. John Brooke when the place was purchased; but, somewhat to her disappointment, instead of being a baronial pile like Lewes or Rochester, the mansion was a villa, more modern than scores of houses in the Tottenham-court Road.

The new and stately villa, with its entablature, pilasters, and balustraded roof, its plate-glass windows and Italian *porte-cochère* of three arches, all in the approved Tuscan style, in summer was half buried among the grand woods of an older dwelling it had replaced; and amid its gardens, shrubberies, parterres, and the old chase, "the eternal loveliness of nature was around it."

The ground descended from the house in terraced slopes, adorned with beds of brilliant flowers; and there of old, on the summit of the gentle eminence, stood the wooden dwelling of Brictric, the Saxon thane, who was also lord of Thaneland, the gift of Harold, by whose side he fell at Hastings; and there, in later years, stood a Norman castle, granted, with other manors in Sussex, to Anne of Cleves—a fortlet whose occupants, in their brightest dreams, could have had no thought of the staircase of coloured marble, the rails and lamps of light Venetian bronze, picked out with gilding; the statues, in the best style of art, in handsome niches; the rare exotics in *jardinières* or majolica vases on tripod stands, and other appurtenances, which made a palace of the Thaneshurst of Mrs. John Brooke.

And as at Park Lane the demi-sea-horse, with the motto "*Spes mea Deus*," was conspicuous on everything, from the hall-chairs to the pediment above the *porte-cochère*, yet it was a house where scarcely-appreciated Titians, Raphaels, Cor-

reggios, and Watteaus replaced the simple chromos and oleographs with which Mrs. John Brooke had been contented in less ambitious days; when their town abode was far eastward of Park Lane; when a month of the sea-breeze at Margate was all then dreamed of summer, and "her John" came always down by "the husbands' boat."

Something of his business habits and strict regularity pervaded the household at Thaneshurst, and everything was ordered there as if by clockwork. The housebell clanged by Mr. Mulbery, the solemn butler, summoned all from bed inexorably at a certain hour—too inexorably Mabel and her friends conceived, if they had come but a short time before from a ball. A second rang for prayers, a third for breakfast, and so on; and under Mr. Brooke's *régime*, none dared to be laggard.

"Loving-kindness is greater than laws," saith the Hebrews, "and the charities of life more than all ceremonies." Thus, with all the forms observed at Thaneshurst, it was a kindly and hospitable household, in which at times, especially about Christmastide, much of old-fashioned jollity mingled with the refinement of a modern country mansion.

The most pleasant feature in the hospitality of Thaneshurst was, that visitors there did just as they chose. The scenery for miles round, with its chalky formations called downs, its open hills with fresh verdure and hollow combs, was beautiful. The stables had plenty of horseflesh, and the coach-houses supplied every kind of vehicle, from the stately carriage with its hammer-cloth, and the 'bus that took the servants to church, down to the little basket phaeton, with its white ponies, in which Mabel, with one of her friends, took many a summer drive.

And more than once it had been declared at the Hussar mess that for what some one calls "a thorough-going cross-country flirtation, by Jove, there is no place like old Brooke's at Thaneshurst!"

Pupkins in irreproachable livery, met Stanley and Seymour at the Lewes station, and in a smart bang-up trap conveyed them, their portmanteaus and gun-cases, along the chalky highway, off which they, after a few miles' drive, turned down the avenue that led to Thaneshurst; and as they

passed a glade in the sunshiny grounds, Stanley's quick, and perhaps too readily suspicious, eye saw Captain Reynolds, in an accurate morning costume, though in the country, with Milly Allingham, walking slowly—Stanley thought "a deuced deal too slowly"—towards the house.

He was bending towards her; and as he spoke her eyes were cast downward, and with a quick hand she was twirling the parasol that rested on her right shoulder: thus Stanley could see that she was smiling brightly. Seymour, who was gazing intently in another direction, did not observe them; and some secret emotion made his friend keep silent on the subject of his own mortification.

"How long have they been together? How often are they together thus? On what terms are they?" thought he. "How long has *this sort of thing* been going on? Fool that I was to come here, only to be tortured by what I may see or suspect!"

Another minute or so, and the trap was pulled up under the *porte-cochère*, where Mr. Mulbery and two tall footmen were in waiting. Mr. and Mrs. Brooke had driven in the carriage to Pyecombe; the young ladies were all in the grounds; the dinner-bell would be rung in an hour. Meantime he would show them their rooms, and send up wine.

The chance information that "the young ladies were *all* in the grounds," afforded some little consolation to Stanley; but wherever they were, none were near Milly Allingham and Reynolds—they, at least, had their *tête-à-tête* promenade to themselves.

Stanley drained a bumper of sherry, as if to drown his sense of annoyance; and after his "traps" had been unpacked, proceeded to make a more than usually elaborate evening toilette, muttering as he rasped away at his thick brown hair with a couple of ivory-handled brushes,

"What the devil is the use? It is perhaps all over now, and I should not have come here. However, I can easily get the adjutant, or some fellow at the Rag, to telegraph for me on urgent business, if I find the necessity of hooking it, and leaving the Guards in possession of the field."

And in this mood of mind he leisurely descended to the drawing-room, after the first or warning bell had rung for

dinner; and Seymour, who heard him descend, and had a comical half-dread of encountering Mrs. Brooke alone, hurried after him; and the modulated hum of female voices announced that the ladies had already assembled and were awaiting them.

When Seymour entered the room, to his infinite relief Mrs. Brooke was not yet there; but Mabel was.

For some time past the whole thought of the latter had been that Tom Seymour was actually coming again to Thaneshurst—very soon. In an hour he would be here! How would he, how should she, comport themselves under the vigilance to which they would be subjected? Poor Mabel felt now that quickening and fullness of the heart which a timid actress may feel before the rising of the act-drop, when an impatient and critical "house" sits beyond it.

In this instance "the house" was mamma.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PROGRESS OF TRUE LOVE, ETC.

AMID the usual greetings and commonplaces, the inevitable discussion concerning the weather, and Mabel's apologies for the absence of Mr. and Mrs. Brooke, Milly's account of her mother's health at Wiesbaden, the prospects of sport on the coming 1st, and so forth, our four chief friends failed to conceal from each other a certain nervousness of manner, and a tendency to talk rapidly, and to invest trifles with a sound of importance they scarcely merited.

Milly Allingham could not repress a blush on seeing Stanley when she recalled their last interview and farewell in London. She could not forget that he had made her a declaration of love most tenderly and earnestly, and that she had—Heaven alone knew why—met it mockingly, even while longing and fully expecting to hear it made again. She could not doubt that he had gladly accepted the invitation to Thaneshurst, and come hither to cast himself once more in her way. One moment she felt flattered by this idea, and the next found all her too-ready pride alarmed, lest he should imagine that *she* had some influence in procuring the invitation so accorded.

And so, with every-day commonplaces on their lips, each of the two friends looked upon the face which, in the love of

his heart, made all other beauty seem plain, and over which that passion cast a halo, as it were, of divinity.

There was a shy smile of fondness—but every smile of hers was a caress—in the love-lit eyes of Mabel Brooke that made the heart of Seymour dance, when again he felt in his the pressure of her little hand—"the link between him and happiness, which to surrender, never to clasp again, would be simply the blank and bitterness of death."

Meanwhile Stanley was surmising whether Milly was pleased that he had come: her vanity was certain to be. Was she annoyed that he had seen her promenading alone with Reynolds, instead of some other man? Stanley found an answer to these silent questions impossible; but there was a serene hauteur in her bearing that was born of the very suspicion that her actions were under supervision or control by him.

"Ha, Stanley, glad to see you again!" said Reynolds cordially, as he came lounging towards the new-comers in full dinner costume. "We thought you would have turned up on the seventh of the month. Miss Allingham assured us that she was certain you would do so."

"On the seventh?" repeated Stanley, perplexed, and still more so to see the colour deepening with annoyance in the face of Milly.

"It was the last Brighton race-day," explained Reynolds; "I had my drag and team down from town."

"It was a delightful day," said Mabel to Seymour; "the course was crowded. From the downs we had a charming view of the sea; and when the races were over, we had luncheon in the Hussar mess-room, 'by invitation from Major Larkspur.'"

"She had been thinking of me, then, at least," thought Stanley—"perhaps longing for me! Was the chance expectation inspired by the wish? and were some of those Hussars a counterfoil to Reynolds?"

But the face of Milly answered none of those questions; however, her usually serene expression was somewhat gone. She was looking more annoyed than ever, and there was actually an angry curl on her lovely lip. The Guardsman's remark had proved, somehow, a blunder.

They were now joined by Alfred Foxley, who came, redolent of brandy-and-water and cigar-smoke, from the billiard-room, where he had been playing one hand against the other, or practising cannons; and whatever were the real emotions that inspired him towards Seymour, he had the good grace to welcome him as warmly as he did Stanley. And now the conversation became more easy and general; but in spite of himself a sense of constraint, of vague indignation, stole over Stanley, and he found himself, during the dull time that always precedes a somewhat formal dinner, talking more to Miss Conyers and other ladies than to her who, for months past, had never been absent from his mind—the first thought in the morning and the last at night.

"Can it be," he sometimes asked himself, "that she cares neither for me nor any other man so much as the visible conquest? By Jove! I shall be pretty sure of my ground, and have some solid data to go upon, ere I make a fool of myself *again* with her, or any other woman.

Mr. and Mrs. Brooke now arrived, within a few minutes of each other. As for the latter, the sample we have given of her advice to Mabel on the night of their last ball concerning Captain Reynolds, and so forth, may serve as an epitome of the general tone and phase of her character, and may explain why her greeting of Seymour, though perfectly well bred, was far from "gushing." Her husband welcomed both guests with equal warmth, but if there was any difference, perhaps it was in Tom's favour.

Mr. Brooke was always more cheery even in the country than in town, and never looked so old as his years,—he was so hearty, healthy, and rubicund, with merry blue eyes, well-preserved teeth, and a pate that shone like a billiard-ball; and now, as usual, he was dressed for the evening scrupulously in black, with a stiff white cravat and angular collar, and shaven to a nicety, with his silver hair brushed up in two sharp peaks, one over each ear.

"Welcome to Thaneshurst, Captain Stanley!" said he; "and welcome too, Tom; but it is not your first visit, and I hope it won't be the last by many," he added, taking Seymour prisoner by the watch-chain and drawing him into an oriel. "Lord, Lord, Tom!" he added, "how like your father you *do*

grow every day as you get older! You quite remind me of the time when he and I used to hob-nob over our pints of bitter and a chop at the Three Snipes in Cheapside, and thought it so jolly to get a pit-order for the theatre or a night at Cremorne; or when we got a holiday, Tom, and took our sisters—and quite as often other folks' sisters—to tea and shrimps and the contemplation of river scenery from the back windows of the Jackdaw at Gravesend,—proud of cheap cigars and voting a clay-pipe, especially a yard of it, vulgar. My eye! what fun we used to have! Nothing like it now, Tom, I often think."

These and suchlike reminiscences were gall and wormwood and intense vexation of spirit to Mrs. Brooke; so she verily hated Tom Seymour for his alleged likeness to his father—though he had been the groomsman at her marriage—and for the memories he revived in the old man's mind; and now she was still further irritated to perceive the slightly-elevated eyebrows and mildly-amused expression of the magnificent Reynolds, whom she sought to engage in conversation.

Poor Mr. Brooke had no share either in her false pride or secret ambition, and occasionally felt now that he "took out" in fashion and show much that he had lost of fun, freedom, and jollity in the old times that could come no more. He looked timidly towards his better half, fearing that he had said something he should not have said, and then glanced at the ormolu clock on the blue velvet-fringed mantelpiece, and saw that dinner would be served in five minutes now.

Assuming the most calm and casual tone he could command, after a few remarks about the emptiness, the heat, and dust of London, Stanley, while bending over Miss Allingham's chair, said,

"You did not mention, when I last had the pleasure of seeing you, that our—that my friend Reynolds was to be here."

She coloured slightly for a second and replied,

"I was on the point of doing so—it was so natural among mutual friends, when I was about to visit the same house; but we were interrupted by visitors, you remember."

He was not likely to forget, as their unwelcome arrival interrupted more important matter than information about the

tall Guardsman's movements. It might really be the case, as she said, that no concealment had been intended in the matter; but while she felt angrily that it was implied, the calmness and perfect composure with which she referred smilingly to a scene that might have ended very differently, ruffled and piqued Stanley now, and he again withdrew to the side of Miss Conyers.

Seymour was watching them narrowly, and thought to himself, "Somehow, these two never will get on."

He liked Milly and admired her, of course, though her mother, from whom she inherited her troublesome pride and hauteur, had once given him an affront, which—though to Milly unknown—he never forgot. In a sudden burst of effusion, when handing her to her carriage at the Brookes' door, she had once invited him to call at Connaught Terrace, but omitted to give his name to the Cerberus in a long coat with gilt buttons, who sat in the hall chair and had supervision of her visiting-list; and who, on Tom handing him his card, carefully scanned the said document from top to bottom, and then from bottom to top, through more than two hundred names, after which he said solemnly,

"Sir, Mrs. Allingham is *not* at home."

"Not at home to *me*—that, I suppose, is the right reading of it," thought Tom, as he turned in rather a vicious frame of mind into the Edgeware Road. "Why the deuce did the old woman ask me to call?" he added, never supposing in his simplicity that she had dismissed the general invitation from her mind the moment it was given. So much for hazy West-end hospitality. He felt thankful as he gazed at Mabel that no such affront had ever been put upon him, even by Mrs. Brooke. However, he was yet to learn of what that good lady was capable when roused.

Mabel and he had fallen in love with each other, if not "at first sight," to use a very hackneyed expression, at least very soon after, and that love had ripened fast amid the partial seclusion and opportunities afforded by such a country house as Thaneshurst; and hence their intimacy became "a method of establishing a preference which is intelligible to some," says Mrs. Norton, "but which nevertheless asserts its triumphant claim to be as good a method as any other, by

some happy union which proves that the suddenness of the choice was no bar to constancy, nor evidence of shallowness."

And while this unavowed love was growing in his heart, he little knew how often Mrs. Brooke had said to her husband,

"That young man should not be here: he is not in our *set*."

As for Mr. Brooke, he did not and would not see all this. If the young folks liked each other's society, why shouldn't they? He never troubled himself about the matter, though Mrs. Brooke *did*. He found young Tom Seymour an agreeable addition to his family circle; he could speak about business generally, was "up" in the "money article," and knew many other things that were to the Guardsman, and even Stanley, things mysterious and unknown; and his calculations went no further.

At last the gong sounded like distant thunder in the lower regions, and the company filed off, Mr. Brooke leading the way with the vicar, Stanley pairing off with little Miss Conyers, Milly with Reynolds, and Mabel with some one else—not Tom, however, her mamma took care of that; and the great meal of the day, or the evening after, was served up in due solemnity and state.

It seemed, however, to Stanley that Reynolds had offered his arm to Miss Allingham very much as if it were a matter of course or use and wont. Was it all an understood thing? To Miss Conyers, we fear, he was not very attentive, though he strove to be so, for his thoughts had taken more than ever the turn of self-torment; and when under that process it is astonishing how ingenious and creative we can be.

Whatever might be the thoughts or aspirations of some of those present, especially those in whom we hope to interest the reader, the dinner passed like any other. Mrs. Brooke was rather vain of her *cuisine*; thus it was perfect in all its component parts, from the Victoria soup, over which the vicar intoned the grace, and the *vol-au-vent à la financière*, the *entrées* and more solid dishes, to the *éclairs à la frangipane de vanille*, and the fruit from the vineries and hothouses of Thaneshurst, whose superintendent, Mr. Digory Digweed, was celebrated over all that district for his grapes.

It was a dinner to which even lovers might do justice, and at which the eminently respectable-looking Mr. Mulbery superintended the due libations of wine.

Not being a sportsman, Mr. Brooke cared little about the prospects of the 1st, and would not join Reynolds and Stanley in their condemnation of reaping-machines, which shaved the fields close and bare, leaving nothing of the high stubble so much affected by the sportsmen of other days, when a good shot was deemed the man who could pick out the *old* birds from a covey and kill them right off ; and though Foxley felt almost inclined to swear at the news, Mr. Brooke heard with perfect equanimity that poachers had been laying snares, and drawing fields with nets, laying night-lines in the reservoirs elsewhere ; and that one, when captured on "a shiny night," had the hardihood to tell the vicar on the bench that he only "picked up" the hare which was found in his possession.

The vicar and the village lawyer failed alike to interest when they talked of parish rates and the income-tax, of Ritualism and the erection of a reredos in a neighbouring church ; and our friends, though they talked fluently enough on them all, found the discussions on the coming 1st, on rink skating at Ryde or Brighton, or the anticipated pleasures of a riding party on the morrow with the young ladies, more consonant to their tastes.

So far as the 1st of September was concerned, Tom Seymour was not fated to make "a good bag," or even fire a shot, as events that could be little foreseen intervened.

Dinner past, after briefly lingering over their wine and coffee, the ladies were rejoined by the gentlemen in the drawing-room. Already the piano was open, and amid the intervals occupied by Balfe and Rossini, Beethoven and Mendelssohn, and while the vicar closely engaged Mrs. Brooke in some matter of local interest, Tom drew near Mabel, though Stanley, with his eyes wandering ever and anon after Milly Allingham, seemed to devote himself to Miss Conyers.

"He that cannot dissemble in love is not worthy to live," according to Lillie's *Euphues*. This is rather a severe fiat ; yet much dissembling is often necessary. Denied by the strict surveillance of her mother, and the jealous watchfulness of her cousin Foxley, the joy of even talking often to each other—Mabel and Seymour—they could at least exchange those stolen glances which, as Byron tells us truly, are the "sweeter for the theft." Of these no watchfulness could

deprive them ; so love throve in silence, and many small and pretty details there were, to be conned over by each fondly when apart ; for, says a casuist, "the taste for stratagem, the little wiles and snares inspired by a first passion, are among the strongest incentives to its origin," and he might have added its permanence.

"I am so glad we have you here again, Mr. Seymour," said Mabel quite openly in her mother's hearing,—"glad for selfish reasons. Papa never plays billiards now, and he gets so cross, the dear old thing, when he has bad hands at long whist." What this had to do with Tom's visit was not very clear ; but she added, "And now about, to-morrow—"

"I have not a horse," said Tom ; "here at least."

"Papa can give you a mount : you can have your choice of the black Irish mare, Neck or Nothing, or the Scots Grey."

"A deuced good nag—sire Avenger," commented Reynolds, looking up from the side of Milly, with whom he was dawdling over an album ; "he will carry sixteen stone with the fastest hounds in Sussex."

"I have a fancy to try that horse myself, to-morrow," said Foxley ; "and so, if Mr. Seymour preferred the mare——"

She is sometimes very unmanageable and tricky, though papa gave 450*l.* for her ; and unless Mr. Seymour has been riding of late—" Mabel paused.

"Why did you suggest her, then?" asked her cousin.

"It was indeed thoughtless of me," said Mabel.

There was a strange smile in Foxley's eyes when they met those of Seymour, who said,

"I shall ride the mare with pleasure, Miss Brooke. I have a firm hand and a good seat, and never fear, if there is any mischief in her when we set out, she will come home quiet enough."

"Without her rider, I hope!" thought Foxley ; but he only said, with a smile full of insolent meaning, "Any way, we shall not ride by Pyecombe to-morrow," and moved away.

Mabel once glanced nervously at Seymour, for it was at Pyecombe that most terrible mischance occurred—terrible at least in the hunting field—when he rode his horse right among the Brighton harriers, while the whole pack were going so close that a table-cloth might have covered them.

"Milly has suggested we shall go round by Brighton,

Hangleton, and so on to the South Downs," said Mabel, speaking very quickly, in hope that her cousin's rude speech had been unheard by Seymour.

"By Brighton be it, then," said Reynolds, twirling his tawny moustache. "I am sure we could not have a better guide to pleasant scenery than Miss Allingham. What do you think, Stanley?"

"I have no opinion on the matter," replied Roland, with a "company smile." "The country hereabout is quite new to me."

"I will show you, Mr. Seymour," resumed Mabel, "where, when Milly and I were out with the harriers, a good hare which was found in a field, went straight over by Poynings and Edburton, then right away down by the river, where he took shelter in some large rabbit-burrows, among which Milly's horse would have come down had not Captain Reynolds and his friend Larkspur of the Hussars been close at hand to grasp her bridle. I was so glad the hare escaped us, as I always shudder to see the poor things killed, and their cries are so piteous."

"Reynolds again—and Reynolds always!" thought Stanley.

"It was to reward him for that," said little Fanny Conyers, all unaware that she would stick a pin into her companion, "she made Captain Reynolds such a beautiful set of colours, in which he is to ride a steeplechase next week."

"The deuce she has!" muttered Stanley under his breath. All such trifles and indications galled him, as adding to the sum-total of his doubt and jealousy. "I *am* a fool to have come here!"

Music chiefly filled up the evening till the time came for retiring—the ladies to rest, the four younger men to have a farewell "weed" in the smoking-room for an hour or so, that was passed less soothingly by the old lord of the manor.

Less ambitious, we have said, than his wife, old Mr. Brooke would have been very content to see his gentle Mabel the wife of his nephew and favourite Alf Foxley, who seemed so fond of her; but the idea of him being a suitor for his cousin came as little into the scope of Mrs. Brooke's plans or thoughts, as did Tom Seymour into those of her inferior half. At the latter she had *looked* much—volumes indeed—all that evening, but said nothing till she could borrow a

leaf from Mrs. Caudle; and they were barely abed when she opened fire upon him.

"So, after all, you have brought *that* Mr. Seymour among us again, Mr. Brooke!" she exclaimed, in a tone indicative more of anger than sorrow.

"Why not, Martha, my dear? His father was the best friend I ever had in the City, long ago."

"Best fiddlestick! What is the use of a young man with only two or three hundred a year, and no expectations?"

"Use—in what way, Martha?"

"Pshaw!"

"I have no doubt he would rather have six or seven hundred a year if he could."

"He is so poor."

"Well, Martha, *I* wasn't rich once."

"So you were vulgar enough to remember, John, with your wretched souvenirs of Gravesend and Cremorne. I wonder what Captain Reynolds thought."

"I don't care a doit what he thought," replied the old gentleman testily.

"After *all* I have told you—do you hear me, *Mr.* Brooke?"

"Yes, Martha dear, well."

"After all I have urged again and again, I say you have brought here that young man, who seems to admire Mabel, and who is not in our set."

"Nonsense! What is our 'set,' I should like to know? And as for Mabel, I wouldn't give house-room to any man who didn't admire her. Then as for Tom, he is a good, and his father was a jolly good, fellow; and many a bit of blue paper poor old Tom did for me, Martha, in the days when I never thought we should drift so far westward as Park Lane and Tyburnia. What can you lay to young Seymour's charge, save that he is poor?"

"Is not that enough, Mr. Brooke?"

"Well, as I said, I was poor enough myself once," urged the old gentleman almost piteously. "Poor old Tom Seymour—Tom Noddy we used to call him, though he wasn't a noddy a bit, but an uncommonly smart fellow. Lord, how ill we used to make ourselves with the cheap cigars and 'old-and-bitter' out of pewter at the Hen and Chickens;

He insured his life for his wife and young Tom, but left the management of it to a lawyer fellow, who cheated them both. Now, Martha dear, please to let me sleep."

"Sleep!" snapped the lady.

"Yes; and don't bother, old ducky."

"You do nothing but sleep, or if awake you thwart and cross me." Mr. Brooke turned on the other tack, and resolved on resolute silence. "Now listen to me for the last time: do you hear me, Mr. Brooke?"

But ere she could say what she intended. a prolonged snore —real or pretended—gave a hint that the lecture had ended for the night.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RIDING PARTY.

AT Thaneshurst everything, even to the disposal of his own time, was at the behest of the visitor: he could gallop on the downs, drive to Brighton, fish in the Ouse, if aught was to be fished there; boat if he chose, shoot, go out with the harriers, or stay at home, if it listed him, to philander on the terrace or in the conservatory. Hence all looked forward with pleasure to the riding party; and during breakfast the route to be chosen was left entirely to Mabel and Milly Allingham.

The morning was lovely: it was one of the last days of August; the extreme verdure of the groves and hedgerows was past; but the golden fruit was ripening in the orchards, and there were already tints in the woods which some prefer to the loveliest blossoms of April and May; and from the windows of Thaneshurst the distant sea could be seen glittering in light, and in the middle distance the green-velvet verdure of the downs, in the combs and hollows between which the silvery morning mist yet lingered.

All were in high spirits; the equestrians were to start soon, that they might return in time to luncheon, as the evening was to be devoted to a great croquet party at the house of a friend; so, while the ladies sipped their coffee out of the most delicate Wedgewood, Reynolds, Stanley, and others, who were more used to club-life, made a meal that might have served for Lucullus, to their coffee adding cutlets, devilled kidneys, and champagne, with other delicacies, *ad libitum*.

On this morning Seymour was rather surprised to find that Alfred Foxley was more than usually attentive to him: pressed some of his most choice cigars upon him, and insisted upon his imbibing more champagne than, at an hour so unwonted, Tom had ever drunk in his life before; and all the while "cousin Alf" had a glitter in his gray-green eyes, and a strange smile on his thin lips, which his red moustache concealed.

"While with us, Seymour," said he, "you must ride daily and ride hard. You are getting too fleshy; we'll have to get you a seven pound saddle. The fact is you government officials feed too well, and so get out of form."

Tom laughed and murmured some protest that he did not think so. While aware that he did not keep a nag, and was not a very experienced horseman, Foxley did his utmost to scare him—as it was proposed when returning to have a free gallop over hedges and walls—by a narrative of rotten ditches, made so to betray the unwary, of drains dug deep enough to break a horse's back, of gates that swung open and caught one's nag in attempting to clear them, of stone walls that were certain to smash a rider's skull if his horse fell back upon him.

"We shall meet with no such things in our homeward ride I am sure," said Seymour, laughingly. "Any way, we shall take everything as it comes, or go crash through it, as the case may prove."

Reynolds, the Guardsman, saw something of Foxley's secret game, and smiled to himself. In fact "cousin Alf" had a natural insolence of character, and that, with a perfect conviction that his means, though far inferior to his wants and extravagance, were greatly superior to those of Seymour, and that his position in the family and household as kinsman of the heiress of Thaneshurst was a confirmed one, gave him every advantage in the furtherance of his ultimate views. He had thus, take it all in all, a species of contempt blended with his intense hate of Seymour, which made him deem that young fellow beneath him—"a muff," in fact, which Tom was not by any means.

"Please, Alf, to leave my Berlin wools alone," said Mabel to that personage, who seemed busy at her work-table in the

recess of a window. "Now, you tiresome Alf, what *are* you doing, twiddling all my bodkins so?"

He only laughed and turned away to leave the room, with a shade of confusion on his face noticed by Stanley alone; but it was very curious that a few minutes afterwards, when requiring it, Mabel found one of her sharp steel bodkins missing, and nowhere could it be found.

Could she have looked into Foxley's room at that moment she might have seen him curiously fixing that identical bodkin into the shank of his riding whip, making it a species of goad, and muttering while he did so,

"So she is to show him where the hare was found in the field. I'll give the Irish mare a prod with this as she takes the rasper, that will make a rasper for Seymour to remember to the end of his days. But it is Lombard Street to a China orange that he'll break his infernal neck."

And the further to achieve this, to him, desirable end he had desired Pupkins, the groom, to give the mare—at all times restive enough—an extra feed of corn betimes; and though Pupkins deemed it unnecessary he nevertheless complied. The friendly Alf Foxley wished her to come forth so fresh and skittish that he would have given her a hot mash with whiskey in it had he dared.

"Won't it be nuts to see him on the Irish mare, a regular flyer from head to heel, especially with the *spur* I shall put into her! I'll have another weed on the head of it."

Unaware of all these little attentions and preliminaries, Seymour was thinking only with delight of the open hint he had received to ride by Mabel's side, and that she was to show him where the hare was found, and so forth; and when the whole party were ready, Stanley came forth determined, so far as *he* was concerned, to leave all to the doctrine of chances. If fate put him by the side of Milly, all good and well; if not, he strove to think he would not care; but we fear he strove in vain.

Of all the four—for there were two Miss Conyers—Milly Allingham looked the most excelling in her dark-blue habit which fitted her fine and round yet slender figure to perfection; and to perfection also were the masses of her dark-brown hair, tightly and curiously coiled up at the back of her

head, thus throwing a little over her forehead the smartest of riding-hats; and, to her well-fitting gauntlets and gold-mounted switch, her toilette was complete.

The cattle were all in fine condition; and leaving the ladies to be assisted into their saddles by any one who chose, Foxley, full of his own thoughts, was already curveting about on Scots Grey. Pupkins, the principal groom, a long-bodied and short-legged man, with a small mean face, with weasel eyes and closely shaven chin, well-worn velveteen jacket, and very loose cord breeches, now led forward, with something o an air of pride, the Irish mare Neck or Nothing.

She was indeed a splendid creature, of a jet-black colour, with a skin like satin, and a white star on her forehead, in full condition, bursting with mischief, and matchless in symmetry; but at times she had an ugly way of throwing her eyes backward and showing a little too much of the white thereof.

Val Reynolds, who with all his "Dundrearyism," was a good-natured fellow, thought that Seymour could scarcely handle such a nag, and, as he afterwards said, was on the point of offering to ride her himself, but feared to give offence by interfering, and thus left the overnight arrangement to be carried out by those most interested in the affair, and swung the Conyers girls deftly into the saddle, adjusted their stirrups, and arranged their reins.

"Is she not a beautiful creature, Mr. Seymour?" exclaimed Fanny Conyers, her little face flushed with excitement and pleasure.

Tom scarcely shared her enthusiasm; and though far from being a timid horseman, he feared that he had been "trapped," and felt instinctively that to-day he would require all his skill and energy; yet he examined the bit in the most approved fashion, and taking the stirrup-iron in hand, brought it sharply under his right arm to try the length of the leather; while, as Mabel patted the mare's side with her gloved hand, the animal swerved viciously round in the groom's hand.

"Take care, miss," exclaimed old Pupkins; "for the Lord's sake, keep clear of her hind feet; she is apt to lash out a little now and then."

"It is only play," said Foxley.

"But main dangerous, Muster Alf," retorted the groom.

"She *is* a rare good un, Miss Mabel; you've seen how she can top a wall, though she does buck-jump, as all them Hirish ones does. You'll find her a capital fencer, sir," he added to Seymour; "only see that she lifts her head well while about it."

"What does it all mean?" thought Tom; for somehow old Pupkins seemed to talk as if they were all going to a steeplechase instead of a quiet ride round Brighton.

Stanley lifted Milly to her saddle, and Reynolds did the same office for Mabel, Seymour not venturing to do so while the eye of Mrs. Brooke was on him from the arch of the *porte-cochère*, where she and her spouse stood smilingly to see the party off, so full of pleasure and laughter, attended by a couple of well-mounted grooms in orthodox riding-suits. Mr. Brooke, though caring nothing about it, knew how to do all this sort of thing well. "Papa, dear old man," as Mabel said, "subscribes to the hounds of course, but would no more think of following them than going in a balloon."

"Take care, Tom; do take care, my dear boy!" cried Mr. Brooke, as Seymour's mare manifested a violent desire to go persistently sideways, or, as Pupkins phrased it, "run up a tree if she could."

As they rode down the avenue, Mr. Brooke lingered, with his left hand under his coat-tail, like Mr. Pickwick, the other waving in the air, and, like Mr. P., his eyes "were beaming with benevolence" through his gold-rimmed spectacles; and Mrs. Brooke was thinking of her last confidence to Captain Reynolds to take care of her Mabel, who was "such a timid thing on horseback"—a little fib made up for the nonce; for Mabel, with all her softness, was nothing of the kind; but, to her annoyance, she saw the captain riding by the side of Miss Allingham. While the party wheeled into the sunny Lewes road, Seymour's mare, now reduced to calmness, ambled by the side of Mabel's bay pad with provoking proximity, as Mrs. Brooke said.

Tom sat the black mare well, and Mabel thought—and she was right—that he had about him the indescribable look and bearing of a gentleman; and the girl was very happy, for now, in the innocence of her heart, she could calculate on the pleasure of his society for a little time without alloy

or the worrying circumspection enforced by the presence of mamma.

How little could she imagine that Foxley, who rode between them, chatting merrily to both, was in full hope to see Tom flying through the mare's ears before very long!"

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PRINCE OF WALES'S OWN HUSSARS.

ROWLAND STANLEY was compelled to admit to himself that there was a certain undefinable awkwardness in his present relations with Milly Allingham. Neither could forget their last meeting or parting, and what had passed between them then. A Rubicon had been crossed by his avowal, which made them more to each other than mere acquaintances or even friends but nothing had come of it; and even with all the facilities afforded by a visit to Thaneshurst it was doubtful how, when, or where, if ever again, the subject nearest the hearts of both—of him most assuredly—would be resumed.

The difficulty of chatting gaily with her, as he could do with her lady-friends, made him adopt another extreme, and become reserved, almost shy, in fact; and thus he, with emotions of jealous annoyance hard to describe, left her almost entirely to Reynolds or any one else.

Milly saw and knew all this; and the conviction of the cause from which his apparent coldness sprung was very soothing to that young lady's pride. While conversing and laughing merrily, they rode on amid the scenery that spoke so genuinely of Sussex: now between fields of rich pasture in varied stripes of green—the farmer's posy—with light and shadow playing on the swelling downs, and the white chalky scaurs in the middle distance, with dark-browed hills beyond. The downs looked green and high, almost like miniature mountains, with white sheep—the famous "south-downs"—feeding far up their sides, and standing in gray relief against the clear blue sky.

After passing Ovingdean, a place about three miles from Brighton, and having a scamper round the racecourse, as they drew near the cavalry barracks, a regular pile of build-

ings, on the Lewes road, three officers of Hussars, in frogged patrol jackets and the daintiest of forage-caps, came cantering gaily up to the party, in a manner which, to Stanley's cloudy mind, remembering all that Milly had suggested yesterday of proceeding by Brighton and Hangleton, had an unpleasant air of some foreknowledge or pre-arrangement.

"Is this chance or mere coquetry?" thought he, as he detected a deepening colour in her cheek and a brighter sparkle in her eye, as they reined in their horses, and paid the usual greetings, with all the finished air of well-bred men.

"The Master of Badenoch, Major Larkspur, and Mr. Craven—Captain Stanley," said Reynolds, introducing them.

"Ah!—remember you—met at the Rag, I think," said the first named, a handsome and good-humoured-looking young fellow, who seemed on excellent terms with himself and all the world, and, like his two companions, seemed a fair specimen of the English cavalry officer, who, in tone and bearing, is superior to every other in the world.

"Out for a canter, eh?" asked the major.

"Yes," said Mabel; "we propose to go as far as Bramber."

"May we join you, Miss Brooke?" asked the major.

"With pleasure." So the three Hussars wheeled round their horses at once, and the party proceeded at an easy walk. The Hussars had nearly all been at Thaneshurst to breakfast and a lawn-meet, so the house was popular with the regiment, which had given a ball in return; and that event had been followed by more walks on the West Pier, croquet-parties, visits to the Aquarium, and lounges in the Pavilion, than our two friends had the least idea of; but Stanley was not a little surprised to find his usually proud and reserved idol was as much at home with the new accessions to the party as with Reynolds, and far more than himself, who had already said that he loved her. Was her pride becoming vanity, her calm yet free manner *aplomb?* This was impossible, unless her character had changed.

He said something of this as he dropped a little way behind with his friend.

"Have you forgotten, Rowland," said the latter, "that

'Maidens, like moths, are ever caught by glare,
And Mammon wins his way when seraphs might despair?'"

"I don't think there is much of the seraph about me, Tom," muttered Stanley; "but I can't help feeling rather bitter on this subject."

"Hallo!" said Tom, "where the deuce are they going?"

"Into the barracks, it would seem."

"The barracks!" said Tom; "for what purpose?"

"To have some fruit and wine in the mess-room," said Reynolds, half turning in his saddle, while Major Larkspur, who was now riding by Milly's side, led the way through the gate across the gravelled yard to the mess-room, where sundry Hussars who were loitering about were summoned to take charge of the horses, while the whole party alighted, and were ushered into the mess-room, a long and cool, but plain and unornamented apartment, with remarkably shiny tables and furniture.

To be in such a place as a mess-room, a land hitherto to them unknown, was to the young ladies a source of great glee and excitement—even Mabel forgot that her mother might remark they should not have been there without some *other* chaperon than her cousin—so everything was the object of inspection and many original remarks. Some Crimean trophies on the wall, the race-cups won by the regiment glittering on the sideboard, and portraits of some colonels of the regiment, including Humphrey Gore, in wig and breastplate, who served in the time of the Hanoverian succession, and H.R.H. George Augustus Frederick, Prince of Wales, in after years; Thackeray's man of well-oiled wigs and ample waistcoats; the hero of the Pavilion close by —the "Fum the Fourth" of Byron.

The messman brought silver beakers full of iced champagne-cup, which was poured into crystal goblets; fruit on salvers was produced in plenty; but Larkspur recommended all to take, in preference, dry cliquot and sliced pineapple, saying in sporting phrase, that "they ran well together;" and, accustomed though he was to barrack life, there was something in the bearing and manner of the Hussar friends, a singular mixture of languor and *insouciance*, that made Stanley smile; for, as Con Cregan has it, it seemed as if "youth were the most embarrassing and wearying infliction mortality was heir to."

Mabel had the reputation of being heiress to great wealth,

yet Milly Allingham received more attention than any of the party; and the master of Badenoch, eldest son of a Scotch peer, as his title imports, "a well-known connoisseur in female beauty and horseflesh," as Foxley whispered, seemed devoted to her; and the fact of so many admiring Milly served somehow to pique the pride of Stanley and to enhance her value in his eyes.

But he felt his anger roused when again the party mounted, and, quitting the barrack, took the way towards Preston, Milly and Badenoch leading, when, dropping a little to the rear, he found himself accosted in that free-and-easy manner which the freemasonry of the service inspires, by Major Larkspur, who began with considerable fluency—and, as Stanley thought, flippancy—to talk of their lady-friends.

The major was about thirty; he had seen more of life than most men of his years; his brown hair already showed a white streak or two; his eyes had a clear and bold, yet dissipated, expression when he looked at women; and his nose, though perfectly straight and handsome, had, we grieve to say, a tint somewhat akin to the scarlet facings of the Hussars.

"Your first visit to this quarter, I suppose, Stanley?" said he, adjusting in his eye a glass, without which it seemed impossible for him to speak.

"To Thaneshurst, yes."

"I meant that. As for Piccadilly-super-Mare, every one comes there at some time. Known the Brookes long?"

"No, only for half a London season or so; and I am here for the first of the month chiefly."

"Ah, I shall be with you then; old Mr. Brooke has put a couple of guns at the disposal of Badenoch and myself. Yours are stationed at— Oh, yes, I remember." And rapidly dismissing the subject as if it did not matter where such obscure fellows as mere infantry were quartered: "Fine-looking girl, Miss Allingham—might stuff a saddle with her back hair, by Jove!"

Stanley rather coldly agreed that she was so; but Craven, the third cavalry man, who by the narrowness of the way had been compelled to fall rearward and join them, was warm in his laudation of Milly's beauty, her grace in dancing and riding, and so forth, especially the faultless fitting of her riding-habit.

"They say at the mess," he lisped, while stroking the place where he was glad to see a moustache was coming, "that she has a pretty pot of money, but she always affects that Guards fellow, Reynolds."

"Did so, you mean, till Badenoch joined to be in time for the regimental ball," said the major; and since then I think Reynolds has been nowhere. He is a great sportsman; has shot and fished all over Norway, from the Cattegat to the land of the midnight sun; and is a fellow who is up to everything in sporting life, from bringing down a couple of red deer on his native hills, right and left—the shots well put with his breechloader—to a rat hunt; and from knocking over his brace of rocketers on a breezy day to a game of pool in the evening. Moreover, as a regular drawing-room pet, no one can have a chance with him, so far as Miss Allingham is concerned. Then he cares nothing about coin, you know."

"But it is no use running after la belle Millicent," lisped Sub-lieutenant Craven, "or I might start for the filly stakes myself."

"Why?"

"She seems chiefly bent on having a string of admirers.

"Well, but what pretty girl is not?" She is a flirt, a coquette if you please; but we make them so—they think it such pleasant fun, playing at being in love."

"But she is deuced stand-off, I can tell you," persisted the sub-lieutenant.

"I don't think Val Reynolds or Badenoch of ours finds her so. By Jove," sighed the major, "but for them I shouldn't care to try and make my innings and bring her to book; for I may have to sell out, Craven, if the oaks on the old place won't clear me."

Craven only laughed, and whistled softly "Woodman spare that tree." "Why not hook the wealthy widow who lives westward of the Steyne, major?"

"Thanks, no; 'life,' as some one says, 'is not a bed of roses, especially when you have a woman to deal with who has seen more of life in five years than you have in twenty. The matrimonial couch would be too thickly studded with thorns. But with Milly Allingham now—"

But now Stanley, who had listened to this with something

of fierce impatience, seeing a place vacant beside Miss Conyers, spurred his horse to the front and joined her. But she found him somewhat of a moody companion as she prattled away, and acting like a sweet little cicerone, as she was, did all the honours of the scenery as they rode by Preston, where she showed him the large house once occupied by Anne of Cleves, and the old church with its slender tower, by Blackington and Hangleton, till they turned at Bramber-on-the-Adur, near the old Norman castle, and rabbit-burrows, where the hare had been lost. But pretty Mabel, having then Tom Seymour entirely to herself, had forgotten all about that episode, which seemed so important yesterday ; and now, as they turned their horses' heads homeward, Alfred Foxley began to think that if he was to turn to account the event of Seymour riding the vicious mare, he had better utilize the first available occasion for mischief.

What he meant to do beyond giving him an affronting and dangerous "spill" it is, perhaps, impossible to speculate. During all this morning ride, the open preference his beautiful cousin had so plainly shown for Seymour filled the heart of Foxley with jealous rage, and a rancour that made him peculiarly oblivious of the eventualities of his scheme.

Who, then, that saw this fashionable, well-appointed, and well-mounted party of friends riding along the sunny English highway, full of animation and high spirits, and attended by grooms in broad belts, could have imagined that among them there was one who treasured in his heart the almost felon intentions of Foxley?

## CHAPTER X.

### HOW TOM "CAME TO GRIEF."

ALREADY they were returning homeward to Thaneshurst ; noon was nearly over, and Stanley, beyond some remark on the beauty of the day, had barely spoken a word to Milly Allingham; and she, piqued perhaps by this, or careless about the matter, made no sign that she wished him by her side, but seemed bent on dazzling Reynolds and Badenoch (as they called him, though his proper name was Comyn), who rode by her rein ; and Rowland could little suppose that

half the animated conversation they carried on across her dwelt on sporting matters.

"How long are she and I to be thus?" thought he. "Is each of us overacting a part to the other? Shall we ever be on any other terms?"

Amid a network of those cool, shady, and green grassy lanes so peculiar to England, the party riding by twos and threes, got rather broken up, and Stanley, after missing Miss Allingham and Reynolds for a few minutes, saw them rejoining the road at a right angle by a path between two fields. They were coming on at a pace so rapid that they nearly rode down a poor old canvas-frocked truffle-hunter, who accompanied by his dog and armed with his *spud*, was hunting under the hedgerows for that fungus which is in so much request about the end of August and beginning of September.

She was trying to rein-in her horse, laughing the while, and quite unlike her usually proud self, at her inability to do so. At last with the asistance of Reynolds' strong and skilful hand, she succeeded, and pushed back her half-disordered hair, looking flushed, breathless, and beautiful, as once again she adjusted herself quietly in her saddle, with her left knee pressed against the horn, the right tightly round it, as her horse was disposed to be restive still, and Reynolds' hand was still placed on her gathered reins, as if to reassure her.

"Thanks, very much," said she, withdrawing, and adding, with a shy glance at Stanley, "we were so near losing you all at that awkward turn of the road where the hare was found."

If aught could steel or rouse the heart of Stanley against one he loved so well, it was some of the features of that day's riding party. He felt too surely that Milly was very much reserved with him—much more so than she was with others—Reynolds especially; and it was but too evident how friendly and intimate they had become during the past weeks at Thaneshurst; and forgetting that people are pretty sure to be so in the limited circle of a country house, he could only mutter, "Muff that I was to come here!" and then remember what he had once felt, the strange possibility of loving and hating at the same time.

But an episode was at hand which diverted the thought of

all speedily from themselves. Badenoch was now making himself agreeable to Mabel, so Seymour found himself between Major Larkspur and Foxley.

"I know a near cut right home, across the fields, through the lawn of the vicarage, our home farm, and into Thaneshurst clean," said the latter, on seeing that all the rest of the party were well ahead along the road. "The way is all open —stubbles or clover fields, with only a few fences; suppose, we have a shy at them. What do you say Seymour?"

The latter hesitated; so Foxley said,

"What say you, major?"

"I am ready; but how about the ladies?"

"The ladies can follow if so disposed; they are all well mounted, and know the country well. Home! Let us see who will be first at the door of Thaneshurst!" cried Alf brandishing his whip.

"It is rather a mad proceeding," said the major, in whom the genuine English racing spirit was easily kindled; but Seymour was less easily excited.

"Come along, Seymour," exclaimed Foxley; "it is all open I tell you, except a fence or two, and we'll take all the leaps together."

"And your cousin?" urged Tom.

"Never mind her; she'll be well enough looked after," said Foxley, almost savagely; "you are surely not *afraid?*"

"Afraid!" retorted Tom indignantly. "How dare you think so!"

But as the trio turned off into a grass field at a rapid trot, Alf uttered something like a malediction as his cousin Mabel joined them at a canter. Her quick eye or her affectionate heart had detected some secret mischief lurking in her cousin's eye; so she said in a low rapid voice to Tom:

"Mr. Seymour, you don't know Neck or Nothing so well as we all do. Don't let Alf lead you over the fences, but do you *lead him*, lest he balk you. Don't rush at the fences too fast; keep her well in hand, with her hind legs well together, and don't plump her whatever you do."

Some of this was rather obscure to Seymour, but his heart beat lightly at the hurried whisper which betokened an interest in his safety.

"Now, cousin Mabel," said Foxley, "you were very foolish to join us."

"Why?" asked the laughing girl, whose spirits became exhilarated by the pace at which they were going.

"Because, when we reach the grass land yonder, the pace will become a cracker," replied Foxley, who was fond of adopting the slang of the harness-room and hunting-field.

Mabel had no breath then wherewith to reply; their friends were all lost now, and she thought of what mamma might say, and that the whole episode was a little wild and unusual in a quiet riding party; and now, as a high beech-hedge appeared before them, they lessened the pace of their horses to breathe them a little, and then all charged it together.

Aware that his practice was but small, and that he was splendidly mounted, Seymour gave all his attention to this first leap. He seated himself well in the saddle as he approached the fence; there was no use for spurs, and as Neck or Nothing sprang into air, he loosened the bridle, using his right hand as well as the left, giving the mare full and free use of her head, leaning his body freely back the moment the spring was made, yet without losing the power of restraining her when the leap was completed, and the beautiful animal had cleared the high beech-hedge without grazing a twig with her shiny hoofs, and also a nasty sunk fence that lay beyond.

"Splendidly done!" exclaimed Mabel, with flushed cheeks and flashing eye, as her horse alighted beside his at the same moment. Alf's nag, Scots Grey, was a second or so behind; Major Larkspur a second longer, but he took the ditch at a broader place, and had only time to exclaim:

"Hang it, Foxley, where are you taking us? what are you up to? This is like a steeplechase!"

He had lit on a rotten bank, come a tremendous "cropper" and lay like a spread-eagle, with his face and patrol jacket all over mud.

Seymour and Mabel were disposed to wait till the major gathered himself up, but not so Foxley.

"Come on, Seymour," cried he; "don't be a skycock; Larkspur's all right. Don't go at a market pace—butter and eggs. We've a rasper or two before us now!"

So Seymour galloped on; and in her anxiety, Mabel accompanied him, but some distance behind now—a hundred yards or so—leaving Larkspur of the Prince of Wales's Hussars to his own devices.

"Now for the trap, while *she* is behind!" muttered Alf Foxley, gently holding in his gray, till Seymour was going with him neck and neck, and not so able to lead as before, and now another hedge higher even than the last rose before them.

"No craning here, Seymour," cried Foxley, "nor must you press the mare so hard as before. There is no sunk fence here. But take care, she looks as if she meant mischief."

There was no sunk fence certainly, as the speaker knew very well, but there was a deep old roadway at the bottom of a bank that shelved abruptly down in the line Seymour was pursuing. The leap was most perilous if not completely cleared, as Foxley knew by old experience *he* himself would do, so he closed in nearer by his side, in his hate of his companion half forgetful that his cousin might follow; but she, aware of the danger, while crying to them imploringly to pause, was seeking at another point a gap in the hedge.

"Charge the rasper!" shouted Foxley, and, as before, to the leap rose both animals gallantly; but now Foxley, still intent on his wicked scheme, in the excitement of the moment, or with one of those sudden gleams of thought which come so quickly for evil as well as good, instead of dashing the goad with which he had armed his whip into the flank of the fiery mare, gave her—unseen somehow by her rider—a dreadful lash right across her eyes—a cut that blinded her for the moment, and made her utter a snort of rage and pain.

Baulked thus in her leap, she sank headlong down in a heap on the hard road; and when Foxley, safe on the other bank, looked back, he saw the mare staggering up, shaking her ears and snorting, quivering in every limb, while blood and dust disfigured her knees; and on the dusty road her rider, still grasping his reins, was lying senseless, with blood oozing from his mouth, and so motionless, that a sudden thrill of terror came over the heart of Foxley.

Passing the hedge at the gap to which she had ridden, Mabel rode hastily down the lane, and, uttering a piteous cry on beholding this catastrophe, leaped from her horse, and

with the reins thrown loosely over her left arm, knelt by the side of Seymour.

"Alf—Alf! Cousin Alfred—dear Alf!" she cried, but in vain.

That worthy, affecting that he had lost all control of his horse, which by dint of spur and bit he was causing to bound and curvet wildly suddenly rushed the animal at a five-foot wall, and lifted him over, hurling the loosened stones behind in a heap, as he vanished beyond it, leaving the poor girl to her terror, her tears, and misery, with Seymour, whom by the pallor of his face she supposed to be killed.

As for Foxley, he was simply sufficiently of a coward to wish to give his rival a dreadful fall or smash; he was not brave enough to murder him—that did not come within the scope of his amiable intentions; and so now, with a heart full of excitement and terror, which he strove to cover by a bearing of mockery and contempt, he rode back towards the party he had left, and speedily overtook Reynolds and Craven with the Misses Conyers; the rest were a few paces off, and all were making merry at the appearance of Major Larkspur, who had preceded him.

"Hallo! what is up, Fox?" said Reynolds; "you look put out."

"We have had another spill," gasped Foxley, while exclamations of alarm burst from the ladies.

"Heavens! not the young lady—not Miss Brooke."

"No; the duffer that rode into the harriers at Pyecombe has come to grief again, and he's broken the knees of the Irish mare. Got spilt at the second fence—craning, or dragging on his bridle, too probably."

"He should have been mounted on a screw; that Irish mare——"

"We have no screws in the stables, Mr. Craven," said Foxley pettishly, to cover his emotion of fright; "he rode, and always rides, like what he is, a duffing city clerk wanting to take his money's worth out of an unfortunate nag hired for the day; and now," he added through his teeth, "Mabel will be piling up the agony over his broken bones, curse him! A regular 'Winkle,' of course he thought himself A 1 in the pigskin," he resumed aloud; "my cousin is with him, but he must be carried home of course."

"Is he a good style of fellow?" asked Larkspur, rubbing the mud off his jacket; while Reynolds, Stanley, and others of the party galloped up the narrow road.

"Yes, in his own estimation."

"Most of us are so," said the Hussar officer dryly; but as he seemed a good-natured fellow, I do hope he is not severely hurt," was the kind addition of the major.

"Can't say; perhaps he has broken 'some of his legs,' as Salem Scudder says in the play."

The three Hussars eyed the speaker contemptuously.

"We'll come over to Thaneshurst and leave our cards to-morrow," said the Major, as they shortened their reins to be off; for no matter who had "come to grief"—even one of the ladies—the Hussars were compelled to leave their friends now and return to barracks, as Larkspur's watch informed them that the warning trumpet for evening parade would sound in twenty minutes, and it would take them every second of the time to scamper back by the Lewes road.

## CHAPTER XI.

### WHAT MABEL'S ALARM ELICITED.

"WILL Alf return? will no one ever come?" moaned Mabel, to whom a few minutes seemed as long as hours of agony.

Never before had grief or terror visited Mabel Brooke; and to see the handsome and good-hearted young fellow whom she loved, and who she knew right well loved her, lying crushed, breathless, bleeding and covered with dust, was her first great shock, and it stunned her. Their friends could not be far off. Alf knew what had happened, so what could be detaining him?

She strove to shriek, to cry for aid; but her voice failed her. Nor could she venture to leave and look for it, till she had done something in the way of attempting to revive him.

With trembling hands she undid his necktie and collar, raised his head on her arm, and while her tears fell upon his face, she kissed him tenderly on the forehead and eyes. She called him imploringly by his name as all the pent-up love of her heart went out to him in that time of terror and agony;

and as she pressed one long, long kiss upon his cheek, he respired heavily and opened his eyes.

Was he conscious of her caresses? Yes, but as one in a dream; he smiled, though there was somewhat of a bewildered stare in his eyes, and he sought to draw her face, now shrinking back, towards him; but his right arm hung powerless by his side.

"Thank heaven, you are recovering!" she exclaimed fervently, for a moment forgetting what her alarm had elicited from her.

"Yet, Mabel" (he had never called her so before) "dear, dear Mabel, how sweet it would be to—to die now!"

"Why?" she asked, blushing in spite of herself.

"With the knowledge that you love me, that I have not loved you in vain, and that I had not lost you."

"Hush, they are coming now," said he, drying her tears in haste, as hoofs were heard approaching rapidly; and just as Seymour strove to stagger up, but did so in vain, being too stunned and weak, Reynolds, Stanley, Foxley, and the grooms came up, and simultaneously sprang from their horses; while Milly Allingham and the Conyers girls came cantering up too; and amid a chorus of questions, entreaties, and exclamations of wonder, pity, and alarm, Seymour was raised from the ground, but was unable to stand without support.

"I thought that mare was too much for him," said Stanley, "and I wish that I had ridden her."

"Why?" asked Foxley.

"Because this accident would not have happened."

"Wouldn't it?" asked the other bluntly.

"Of a surety it would not."

"How?" he asked, remounting his gray.

"Because I am a more experienced horseman than poor Tom."

"It was his own choice," said Foxley sulkily.

"Pardon me, it was your planning, I think."

"It was *not* my planning, but Mabel's suggestion," said Foxley crimsoning with anger.

"And your too ready adoption," retorted Stanley, whose secret dislike of Foxley was intense; "but it matters nothing now."

Though scarcely thinking so, Stanley, who had seen many a broken bone when on service, assured Mabel that nothing was fractured ; yet Tom's right arm was powerless, his head contused, his whole system violently shaken, and there was reason to fear that he might have suffered serious internal injury ; while the black mare, who was less the cause of all this mischief than the treacherous cut that Foxley had given her across the eyes, was leisurely cropping the grass by the wayside a few paces off, till one of the grooms captured her. From the headlong manner in which she came down, Tom's hat, which was battered out of all shape, had alone saved him from, perhaps, concussion of the brain.

"Oh, Mabel," said Milly, "how could you be so rash as by your presence to encourage this wild racing."

"Encourage it !" exclaimed Mabel, tears starting again to her eyes.

"But of course you followed your cousin ?"

"My cousin ?" said Mabel, with something of scorn upon her quivering lip ; for vaguely and angrily she had some undefinable suspicion in her mind. "I rode while I could by Mr. Seymour's side, for I feared the mare was beyond his skill as a horseman."

With all his stifled hate Foxley, as he surveyed the battered, dust-covered figure, and pale blood-streaked visage of his rival, was not without certain emotions of alarm. Thus there occurred to him the reflection of how he should have felt had Seymour been killed outright. Would he—Alf—have been suspected ? had any eye unseen beheld him give the vicious mare the tremendous cut he did ? But though emotions either of compunction or pity found no place in his heart, he was rather glad that the general catastrophe was less serious than it promised to be. "He will be sent back to town ; and anyhow, we shall be rid of him at Thaneshurst," was his final idea. But Mr. Alfred Foxley was mistaken in this, and could little conceive how all his schemes were conducing to the very end he sought to mar.

A door was unhinged from the outhouse of a neighbouring cottage, and with the aid of the dismounted grooms, Stanley and Foxley too, Seymour was placed thereon and borne shoulder high through the chase towards Thaneshurst House.

"Keep step, keep step together, you fellows," said Stanley from time to time, with a voice of authority and anxiety. "I have seen too many sick and wounded borne in dhooleys and litters not to know that every jerk gives pain."

Luncheon was spread in the stately dining-room at Thaneshurst; Pupkins and his staff were in waiting to receive the cattle, and Mr. Mulbery, who had been on the look-out for the returning riding party, and whose chief anxieties were the state of the thermometer in his pantry, which suggested that the madeira might be worthless, or that the '15 port was not properly decanted, was now airing his portly figure under the cool and breezy *porte-cochère*. Mr. Brooke, sunk in his easy-chair, was deep in the money article of the *Times*, and was considering the fluctuation of Egyptian and Peruvian stocks, the flatness of Mexican, and so forth; while Mrs. Brooke, seating herself in a bay-window, alternately watched the avenue, and dawdled over a piece of charity work that, like the web of Penelope, never progressed. Mr. Brooke was just in the act of saying, "Surely these young folks are very late, Martha. I hate being kept from my meals!" when an exclamation of alarm escaped his usually placid better-half on beholding the approaching procession; and really, with the five led horses and the litter borne shoulder-high, it had a sufficiently appalling aspect.

"Oh, what can have happened!" she exclaimed, starting up with clasped hands. A glance convinced her that Mabel was safe—the girls were all in their saddles. An accident had happened to some one. Ah, if it should be Captain Reynolds, a darling scheme might be crushed for ever; consequently she was greatly relieved in her mind when Pupkins, with an expression of face as if he thought it something of a joke, came hurrying into the entrance-hall to announce that the Irish mare had "given Mr. Seymour a precious spill in rushing at a rasper."

It was *only* Mr Seymour; yet the lady could not but look concerned, while the emotions of her husband were genuine and deep, as Seymour was borne at once to his room, and the two grooms were hastily despatched for medical aid.

Stanley and Mr. Mulbery got the sufferer undressed and into his bed, while Val Reynolds, caressing his tawny

whiskers, and imbibing brand-and-seltzer in the dining-room, with Foxley doing ditto with Röderer's champagne well iced —he was horribly thirsty—retailed all he knew of the catastrophe.

"Some fatality attends that boy whenever he comes here, Martha!" exclaimed Mr. Brooke.

"Then ask him no more," she replied; "to preclude the risk is very simple."

Mabel's heart swelled as she listened; but she turned affectionately to her father, who said: "Poor Tom, poor Tom! I have known him, Captain Reynolds, ever since he was a little boy about so high," he added, holding a fat pudgy hand about six inches from the Turkey carpet. "And so you are to blame for this, Alf?"

"I, sir?"

"Yes, you: by proposing this madcap race. With ladies in your company, how could you think of such a thing?"

"Well, any way, we won't have him with us on the first. If his shooting is no better than his riding, it might prove more dangerous for others than himself."

"But here is Clavicle, the doctor, at last," said Mr. Brooke, who bustled out to meet that personage as his brougham was announced at the door.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PATIENT.

AFTER due time the doctor, a pleasant little man with an ample beard, a merry roving eye, and a sunny, suave, and cultivated professional manner, joined Mr. Brooke in the library, where he anxiously awaited him.

"Will the lad pull through, doctor?" he asked impetuously.

"Well—ah, my dear sir," began the doctor, playing with his beard.

"Don't hesitate to tell me the worst. I would rather lose a thousand—ten thousand pounds—than have had Tom's son lying in this way here."

"Where could he be better cared for, my dear sir?"

"Any bones broken?"

None."

"Thank God!"

"But there is a severe case of dislocation, and then that knock on the head is an unpleasant feature. But there is every hope; he is young and healthy, yet must be kept very quiet—no excitement or anything of that sort, my dear sir. He has, though blood has been lost, feverish symptoms, so ice must be used freely. He is quiet now and likely to sleep, and he must remain here for the present."

"Of course, doctor, of course."

"It might be death to move him, my dear sir."

"Of course; we shall take every care. Oh, doctor, I love that lad as if he was my own son!" exclaimed Mr. Brooke, while Alfred Foxley, who had just entered, ground his teeth as he heard him.

Then the doctor departed, announcing that he would call again on the morrow; but in a turn of the avenue his brougham was stopped by Mabel, who was still in her riding-habit, with the skirt thrown over her left arm, and who thought he had been an age in Tom's room and with her papa.

"Dr. Clavicle," said she, pausing and shivering, for all this excitement and suffering were so new to her after her butterfly existence, this deep care for and love of any one beyond her parents,—"doctor, please—"

"Well, Miss Brooke," said he, smiling, and retaining in his the little hand she had placed on the open window of his brougham.

"Do you think he—he will die?" she asked with blanched and quivering lips.

"Die! Not at all."

"Thank Heaven!"

The doctor smiled a professional smile; he had them for all kinds of occasions.

"You know this is a dreadful thing to happen to a guest here," she added, as if to explain the cause of her too apparent interest.

"Perfectly, my dear Miss Brooke; all the more dreadful that the patient is young and handsome," he added, with a knowing look; "but don't alarm yourself."

"His poor right arm——"

"It is only a dislocation of the humerus or the upper bone

which, from its articulation as well as from its exposure to external injuries, is the most subject to dislocation of any in the human subject. His fall was a severe one, and I detected dislocation of the humerus instantly by the depression or cavity on the top of the shoulder, and the inability to move his arm. But I have now put the head of the bone in its proper place, and, my dear Miss Brooke, there is no cause for fear unless there is some internal injury."

All this sounded dreadful and mysterious to Mabel, especially that Tom should be spoken of as "a human subject;" so she said hesitatingly,

"I would that I were allowed to nurse him."

"I fear that in that case he might be in no haste to get well," said the doctor gallantly. "But good-morning, my dear Miss Brooke—good-morning."

And as his brougham rattled down the avenue, he thought no more of Tom than of the last year's leaves, and betook him to *Punch* or the *Lancet*, while Mabel repeated to herself his last fatal surmise about the "internal injury." It came to her ear like a knell.

Mrs. Brooke was not an unkind or inhospitable person in the main; but it *did* worry her to find "that Mr. Seymour" an invalid in her house, an object of solicitude apparently to all, established as it seemed *en permanence;* and to meet from time to time servants going upstairs with trays of beef-tea and dry toast, arrowroot and sherry, Digweed's best grapes, and Mulbery with iced champagne; and more than all was she irritated by finding Mabel hovering, as if for the latest intelligence, near the room of one who but for her "John's arrant folly," should never have been at Thaneshurst at all.

The first day of the accident passed slowly and heavily on. While poor Mabel, with her heart like to burst, sat in the drawing-room with a "company smile" on her sweet face, endeavouring to look unconcerned, and fearing that she had already revealed too much; while Mrs. Brooke fretted with the servants and fumed with every one, and her spouse pottered to and fro in great anxiety; and while Foxley knocked the balls about in the billiard-room with Val Reynolds or scanned *Bell's Life* in the harness-room, and seemed quite

at his ease,—unfortunate Tom Seymour, little knowing the jealous treachery of which he was the victim, tossed wearily and feverishly on his bed, only conscious at times when he asked for a medicated drink, which Rowland Stanley, who, when on service, had seen much of sickness and suffering was ever at hand to give him.

So the dull evening crept on, varied only by frequent messages to the patient's room; while inquiries, suggestions, and speculations concerning the accident, and anecdotes of similar cases, made up the staple of the conversation carried on at intervals in the drawing-room; and good Mr. Brooke, who worried his worthy and fashionable better-half by so often insisting on being helped twice to turtle-soup at dinner, and assisted as often to iced rum-punch, partook of neither that day. He was "too cut up," he said, "about old Tom Seymour's boy."

"I do wish that I had been in the saddle of that mare," said Stanley, "instead of poor Tom."

"But you might have been now in Mr. Seymour's place," said Miss Allingham gently.

"Scarcely; yet all the better were it so."

"Why?"

"Because," said he in a low voice, "save with the regiment, I have no one to regret any suffering or peril to which I may be subjected; but *he* has."

Stanley was looking at Mabel, and thus he failed to see that which would have made his heart thrill—a pleading and upbraiding glance in the soft dark eyes of Milly, while those of Mabel looked at him almost with affection, she was so full of gratitude to him as the friend of Seymour; and it was on him she chiefly relied for exact reports of her lover's progress towards recovery. She often found the eye of her mother regarding her watchfully, if not suspiciously; and when alone with her, she was always told by the old lady how irritating it was to think that because of this accident, the result, no doubt, of his own want of horsemanship, Seymour was more than ever linked somehow with Thaneshurst and the Brooke family. And once the poor girl's blood ran cold when she heard her mother say angrily, "I wish the mishap had taken place at Brighton rather than here."

"Why, mamma?"

"Because then he might have been taken to some hotel, or the hospital perhaps."

"Martha dear, please don't talk so," urged Mr. Brooke; "he'll get well all the sooner in the hands of friends."

And while her mother said these and many other hard things, Mabel had but one thought in her heart.

"If he should die after all. Oh, if my Tom, my darling, should die, and he loves me so!"

Yet with all her regard for Seymour, with all the love she knew so well he had long borne her, she could not but feel her cheek grow hot when she thought over that scene in the lane, and of all she had said and done under the impulse of terror and affection. She had taken the initiative; the first declaration of love had come from her; yet she could not blame herself, and knew right well that Tom would not *blame* her either. Two days elapsed before Alfred Foxley could bring himself to visit the bedside of his victim, and then only because his studied absence therefrom might excite remark. He accompanied Stanley, and did his best to appear perfectly at ease, for the eye of the captain regarded him steadily.

"Well, Seymour, old fellow, how are you?" he asked, shaking the left hand of the patient, whose right arm was still powerless and the source of exquisite pain. "I have brought you a box of fresh cigars, if the doctor and mamma Brooke have no objection to you smoking them here."

"Thanks; you are very kind."

"You did not give the mare her head enough that time; you'll do better next, and not come such a cropper again," added the hypocrite, as he pressed the cold moist hand of the sufferer with apparent cordiality. "I warned you that Neck or Nothing meant some mischief."

"But too late," said Seymour; "poor Mabel—"

"Mabel?" repeated Foxley, biting his nether lip under his red moustache.

"I mean Miss Brooke; what a fright she must have got!"

"Not at all," replied the other bluntly; "she has seen more than one spill in the hunting-field; and the affair was like being out with the hounds, without being hampered with mamma at the Meet."

Foxley's tone seemed to hint so much as to say, "Don't flatter yourself, my fine fellow, that you are too much an object of interest."

"I think you must have been a sheet or two in the wind the other day," said Foxley, with one of his unpleasant laughs.

"How can you think so?" asked Seymour.

"Remember the champagne-cup of those Hussar fellows; and perhaps it helps still to make you look so fishy and seedy Flowers, eh?" he added, as his eye fell on a beautiful bouquet in a fine Chelsea vase by the bed-side, the blue ground of which was painted with pastoral subjects.

"Miss Brooke is so kind as to send me fresh flowers every day."

"Oh, ah, Mabel sent them—kind little thing, Mab! But you must have toppled off too much of that beastly stuff at the barracks."

"Excuse me, Mr. Foxley," said Stanley, with a stiffness of manner and something of sternness in his tone as he resented this coarseness of phraseology and the imputation, "your words are unjust to my friend, and rather rude as referring to the Hussar mess. And now I think we will withdraw, as conversation is apt to make him feverish."

The truth was that Seymour knew precisely the amount of liking Foxley had for him; and though he came now in the guise of a friend, his presence, his manner, and what he had said, brought a flush of unconcealed anger into the face of the listener; and, turning away, he waved his hand to Stanley, and said, "I would rather be left alone."

And when alone, if he was not without some anxiety as to the future, he was full of happy thought. From the first moment when he became perfectly conscious and realised all that *had* passed, he felt only delight amid his bodily sufferings—delight as he recalled, like a delicious dream, the tearful and lovelit eyes that were gazing into his; the caresses, the kisses, the passionate utterances that brought him back to life. He was not so much stunned that he could not recollect all, and act the whole episode over again and again in memory. And so would he fondly muse as the evening stole on, and the perfume of the flowers *her* dear hands had gathered was wafted

towards him, while twilight faded on the green swelling downs and on the distant tumbling sea, and the chimes were ringing so sweetly in the old square tower of the ivy-mantled village church. How delicious was the complete consciousness that she loved him, even though she never might be his! And he thought of a song she had sung to him,

> 'Those evening bells, those evening bells,
> How many a tale their music tells!'

and so forth.

How, when, or where would the last link of that love idyl in the lane be taken up again? Each evening, more than any other time of the twenty-four hours, was full of such thoughts, —"evening, when," as Drake says in his *Evenings in Autumn*, "the busy scenes of our existence are withdrawn, when the sun descending leaves the world to silence and to the soothing influence of twilight, has ever been a favourite portion of the day with the wise and good; when there appears to be shed over the universal face of nature a calmness and tranquillity, a peace and sanctity as it were, which almost insensibly steals into the breast of man, and disposes him to solitude and meditation. He naturally compares the decline of light and animation with that which attaches to humanity; and the evening of the day and the evening of life become closely assimilated in his mind."

But Tom's reveries took, perhaps, more poetical turns than those referred to. The wild whirl and turmoil of London life seemed far, far away from Thaneshurst. Through his open window stole the songs of birds, the rustle of leaves, the perfume of flowers, the chimes of bells in the village spire, the hum of bees, the voices of children playing in the shady green lanes—all the subdued sounds of life in the country.

If quietude and repose would restore him—if, when the time for it came to pass, the musing of dear Mabel Brooke could do so—Tom Seymour was soon in a fair way of being back at his desk in the City. As time stole on and his absence became protracted, his great fear was that he might forfeit his situation. What if he were maimed for life! He had served long enough, young though he was, to obtain even a pension from the niggard Whigs; but on such he might starve after all. And these were cloudy thoughts to foster side by side

with those of love and Mabel. And then there was her mother.

"I know the old lady despises me," said Tom one day to Stanley. "I fear she won't even confess that I have a share in 'the great firm which, under the name of Adam & Co., has toiled so long and industriously.'"

So the time stole on. The newspaper paragraphs concerning "the late serious accident at Thaneshurst," the cards left again and again by Messrs. Comyn, Larkspur, and Craven of the Hussars, and by friends and neighbours of the Brookes, were all unknown to Tom; while he progressed towards convalescence. Prior to this, Stanley's bugbear—for such he rather was—had left Thaneshurst to visit elsewhere.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### PIQUE.

"GOOD-BYE, Captain Reynolds," said Milly as he bade her farewell at the conservatory door, when Mr. Mulbery announced the mail-phaeton awaited him.

"Adieu, Miss Allingham; and be assured that in the steeplechase I shall carry your colours to the fore."

"And do let it be your last race, Captain Reynolds," she urged.

"Why?" asked the captain, caressing his flyaway whiskers with a smile of surprise.

"Because such things are *so* dangerous."

He laughed, bowed himself out, and was gone, as he was engaged to shoot elsewhere on the 1st of September. The closest observation failed to enlighten Stanley, who saw them separate then, how the Guardsman stood with Milly Allingham, as he had been equally attentive to Mabel, to Fanny Conyers, and her sister, both of whom were very attractive girls. But neither could Stanley ascertain how he personally stood with her; she was ever so provokingly serene and self-possessed. One fact became impressed upon him with unpleasant suspicion: that she never gave him, while Reynolds was at Thaneshurst, an opportunity—or perhaps chance failed to afford it—of being alone with her for a moment; so there could be no resumption of the subject of that *tête-à-tête* which had been so untowardly interrupted in town.

Stanley, however, felt almost assured that there could be nothing *in petto* between her and Val Reynolds, their parting seemed so simply like that of every-day friends in the world. I say almost assured; for, notwithstanding this apparent ease of manner, they might have their own great secret for all that he knew; Reynolds might already have made a declaration, have proposed and been accepted. His good looks were undeniable, and his expectations were—as Mrs. Brooke so often said to Mabel—so great.

Well, he was gone now; but was to return in time for a ball, to be given by the Hussars before their departure from Brighton; and thus, during his temporary absence, Stanley certainly had the field all to himself; but with all his love for Milly, he shrank from again subjecting himself to such a humiliation as he had encountered in London.

But Milly deceived others, as she in some way deceived herself; for under a stratum of pride lay her real nature, all cheerfulness, warmth, and kindness. She was intelligent too, and a well-read girl. She had a profound love of books, and her taste for ancient lore was not the least remarkable feature in her character. Thus she was wont to amuse the young officer with odd scraps of quaint information about Lewes and Brighton, Thaneshurst and other places; and he found himself letting his cigar get cold between his fingers, whilst he gazed into her soft dark eyes and animated face, and heard her telling of the Earls of Warren and the Priors of Lewes, of the Devil's Dyke and the Poynings, who were lords of Poynings, with their famous ruby ring of inheritance; and so forth. Yet it suited her at times, when she felt piqued with her lover, to adopt a very different tone and manner; and of this he was unpleasantly conscious soon after the departure of Reynolds. He had left Seymour's room, and to avoid Foxley, whose society he at no time desired, had strolled into the garden, and resting himself in the arbour, lit a cigar, and with its soothing aid, while half sunk in reverie, began to think over the whole situation and his chance of success with Milly, which, if ever again put to the issue, would require to be so ere long, as his leave of absence was fast coming to a close He suddenly became aware that Milly and Mabel, with Fanny Conyers, were in his vicinity. The girls, with their

arms entwined in that loving way peculiar to many young ladies when no rivalry is at work, were promenading to and fro on the grass of the croquet ground, between which and the arbour already mentioned there was a closely-clipped yew hedge, a relic of the older mansion of Thaneshurst. They were talking with gay anticipation of an archery meeting that was to take place somewhere, of Lincoln-green jackets and Robin Hood hats with *bersaglière* plumes, of the Hussar band, diamond prizes from Hunt and Roskell's, the luncheon from Fortnum and Mason's, and flirtation *ad libitum*.

"These are all very well," said Milly after a pause; "but really I do not care to make the tips of my 'fairy fingers' sore and my elbows weary by twanging a bow, when my arrows always go wide of the mark or vanish amid the gorse, and so forth. Tame as it is, I prefer croquet; it shows one's skill in another way."

"And one's insteps too, and the prettiness of our high-heeled boots," added Fanny Conyers.

"Talking of croquet, we must have a regular match," said Milly Allingham. "I wish, Mabel, your mamma would ask the new curate here, now that Val Reynolds has gone and the Hussars are so soon to move too."

If aught in this speech could add to Stanley's pique, apart from calling Reynolds by his Christian name (which was so unlike her usual etiquette), it was the memory of a certain passage in Mabel's letter concerning the curate's admiration for her friend.

"Though only the curate, he is a man of very high family," said Mabel, as her mamma's aristocratic proclivities occurred to her.

"There is to be service in the church this evening. Do let us drive over," said Milly.

"But we seldom go to church in the evening," urged Mabel.

"Well, dear, let us have the curate here," said Milly, laughing. "I must have an *attaché* of some kind, and now that Captain Reynolds has gone I shall certainly flirt with the curate."

"Reynolds gone, the Hussars going; so now she must amuse herself with the curate. *I* count for nothing," thought

Stanley, with growing anger. "She is a heartless coquette, and can neither care for me nor any man."

He tossed aside his cigar, and, thinking he had overheard quite enough, walked softly away, little supposing that Milly was doing injustice to herself, and that all this was mere rantipole, if one may use such a phrase with reference to a girl like her; but ere many hours elapsed he found means to pique her most effectually in return. It chanced that on this very evening tea had barely been brought into the drawing-room when the Reverend Alban Butterley was announced, and was welcomed with much *empressement* by all, and by Milly with more than she would have displayed if she had possessed the least idea that Stanley had overheard her.

After some inquiries regarding the progress of Tom Seymour towards recovery, the reverend gentleman seated himself beside Mrs. Brooke, and proceeded first to make himself especially agreeable to her. Stanley could see that he was a man not without several personal attractions, apart from his known eloquence, learning, and undoubtedly good position. He was tall and well made, possessed a good figure and air of high breeding; but his eye was a roving and shifty one, that seldom looked at any one long. He was scrupulously well dressed, his white cravat—cut as like a Roman collar as might be—was tied to perfection, and he wore a long black frock-coat, serge waistcoat, and faultlessly-made patent boots. His hair was parted in the centre, he was closely shaven, and was the model of a drawing-room apostle; yet his presence failed to excite the least alarm or jealousy in the breast of Stanley, to whom he addressed most of his inquiries concerning the health of Tom Seymour.

"I can assure you, Mr. Butterley," said Mrs. Brooke, "that Captain Stanley seems to make a most excellent nurse, from all I can hear."

"He has quite mistaken his profession, I think," added Mabel, with her eyes expressing intelligence and gratitude.

"Nursing seems rather an unusual occupation for a young officer," said Mr. Butterley, playing with his cup and spoon, and simpering like a genteel apostle.

"Oh, not at all," urged Stanley. "When on service up country, I have often had to doctor, and nurse too, the sick

—soldiers, their wives, and children—when in places where there were neither hospitals nor medical aid. When men died in their tents of cholera, sunstroke, or jungle fever; and when they were buried, perhaps with only a blanket round them, in a trench close by, it fell to me to read the Burial Service over them."

"You must have seen much of suffering and death in that part of the world," said the Reverend Alban sententiously; "but man is born to sorrow, even as the sparks fly upward. Another cup; thanks, Miss Brooke."

"Yes, Mr. Butterley," said Mr. Brooke; "and I can assure you that this spill of my young friend Seymour has proved a deuced annoyance to an old fellow such as I, who now prefers port to burgundy after dinner, and a nap over the money article in my easy-chair."

"Just this month, about this very day two years ago, a young brother officer died, I may almost say in my arms, under very gloomy circumstances," said Stanley thoughtfully.

"And where was this?" asked Milly.

"In a land far, far away—a land almost unknown even by some in this country."

As the preamble somewhat interested the ladies, Stanley was pressed to tell the story of his friend, and he frankly began at once, in the following words. But Rowland Stanley was a fair specimen of a thorough-going, modest, and unpretending young English officer; thus he told his little narrative, all unconscious of the interest that having faced many perils in distant scenes gave him in the estimation of his fair audience.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### FROM BRIGHTON TO BHOTAN.

"I HAVE but a simple story to tell you," he began, "with something of adventure but nothing of romance in it, though many thousands of miles distant, even as the crow flies, from the land of the South Downs and the region of Brighton. When our regiment was detailed as a portion of the field force under General Dunsford for service against the marauding hill-tribes in Bhotan, we were placed in the column of

Brigadier Mulcaster, and began our march in October, with orders to scour all that north-eastern quarter of India which extends from the southern declivities of the Himalaya range to the level ground which constitutes the northern boundary of the great valley of Assam, and to erect at certain places hill-forts or posts for the repression of the fierce Bhoteas, who had been making armed raids along our frontier and carrying off people and cattle, as the Moss-troopers were wont to do on our Borders long ago.

"It was likely to prove a perilous and arduous duty, but the scene of operations was new to us; we were all young, ardent, and eager for adventure; and so we marched into the mighty recesses of those vast mountain ranges with hearty good-will.

"I had in my company an ensign, a fine and handsome young lad, little more than a boy in fact, who was a great favourite with all, he was so sweet-tempered and amiable, and yet withal so ardent and hazardous. 'Little Wickets' we called him when he joined us fresh from Rugby, for he proved himself a prime bat and bowler, and speedily became captain of the regimental Eleven; and from the mess-table the sobriquet became known among the rank and file, who always spoke of him among themselves as 'Little Mr. Wickets.'

"The lad had one strong and firm feature in his character—an intense love for his mother, and this pure sentiment kept him out of all the scrapes and follies into which our other youngsters were so prone to fall. Thus, though some of the subalterns were inclined to chaff Wickets for this, the sentiment—of which he never made any concealment—was ever commended by our seniors. When urged to bet, to gamble, to linger over his wine, or so forth, he invariably declined.

"'Wickets, what a muff you are!' some one would say. 'Why? It would grieve my mother to think I did such things; moreover, I promised to her that I never would,' he would reply simply, and it seemed to me sweetly, heedless of the laughter he sometimes elicited; and when the lad spoke of his mother, who was far, far away in pleasant and peaceful Kent, as he often did to me when I became his chief chum and confidant, a chord came into his voice and his eyes lit up as if he was speaking of some young girl's love; but that is a feeble tie when compared with the love of a mother.

"After much toil, marching through jungles where only three miles' progress might be made in a day, and where strong doses of quinine alone counteracted the effects of the malaria; or through primeval woods, the abode of the ounce, the barking deer, the horned yak, the tiger, and the leopard, and where the trees had stems like the Duke of York's Column in diameter, and as lofty; through vast and long vistas of foliage where sunshine never penetrated, and where their depth and growth seemed to speak of centuries; where the wild rhododendrons seemed as rosy weeds; and after much severe fighting at times, especially at Julpigori, Ambiok, and in the Chamoorchee Pass, we found ourselves advancing to a place called Bishensing, where the feathery jungle grass grew so high that it quite concealed even the largest of our baggage elephants; everywhere erecting posts, leaving detachments, and making arrangements for the civil government of the newly-annexed territory by dividing it into districts under deputy commissioners, greatly to the disgust of the Bhoteas.

"Though the latter seemed to be effectually quelled and quieted now, they were nevertheless making secret preparations for a combined attack upon the whole line of hill-posts we had established throughout their country.

"My company formed a portion of the little garrison at a post called Dewangiri, under Colonel Campbell, who had also with him six companies of the Assam Light Infantry, a company of Roorkie Sappers, some artillery and Bengal police: and it was while stationed there that some singular circumstances occurred.

"On the 1st of December we took up our quarters there, in a room of a stone-house that whilom had been the abode of a Lama priest, whom we ejected without much ceremony, and he departed, muttering vengeance, but chiefly against Wickets, whom he detected making a caricature of him with a burned stick on the whitewashed wall, portraying him with his long garments, goat-like beard, and high head-dress. That night I was captain of the main-guard, so Wickets had the room to himself, and, weary with our long march across the Berhampooter river, retired early to his camp charpoy or bed, and was soon—as he told me afterwards—sound asleep,

"As the enemy were suspected of being in our vicinity, the inlying piquet, after parading at sunset, slept in their clothing and accoutrements, and I had to visit my sentinels almost hourly to see that they were on the alert. About midnight, lingeringly, with a cigar in my mouth, I was returning from this duty, and I remember being on this occasion rather disposed to pause and survey the mountain scenery of the Himalayas, so varied and magnificent, with sharp and pointed peaks that soar sublimely from their vast and lofty bases.

"By day the size of these stupendous mountains, their apparently endless extent, the clearness of their most distant outlines against the pale-blue sky, make a scene of wild and wonderful beauty; but at midnight, as I saw them then, when myriads of diamond-like stars were twinkling in a sky whose blue depths were almost black, the pale snowy cones had an aspect of sublimity without parallel, and still grander becomes the effect when the first light of dawn tips these summits with fire, while darkness yet reigns in the distant plains and valleys of Assam.

"As I turned away, the ghurrie, or little gong at the main-guard, proclaimed midnight, and the last stroke had scarcely died away when I heard a succession of pistol-shots, a shout of pain; and two men, who dropped from the window of my quarters in the house of the Lama priest, fled past me like hares, and vanished in the distance. Accompanied by some of the guard, I drew my sword and proceeded with lights to the room, where we found Wickets in a high state of excitement in his nightdress, with a recently-discharged revolver in his hand, and several marks of blood were visible on the floor and the sill of the open window from which I had seen the men drop.

"When I dismissed the guard and he became more composed, he told me that he had just had a singular dream, in which he saw two men, of whom one was the Lama priest, armed each with a khandjur or Indian dagger, which he knew by instinct to be poisoned, enter the room stealthily by raising the green jalousy of the window. He saw with terrible distinctness their dark visages, their fierce gleaming eyes and white glistening teeth, but heard not a sound, so

soft and muffled were all their movements, and snake-like or Thug-like mode of approaching him.

"To add to the horror and misery of the crisis, while perspiration rolled over his temples, he felt as if deprived of all power of volition, and was unable to find the revolver, which, like all the rest of us, he kept loaded beneath his pillow. Another moment and he knew the poniards would be in his throat and heart. But a voice—a voice he could not fail to recognise—the voice of his mother, yet sounding strangely and seeming to come as if from a vast distance, cried: 'God aid my poor boy, or he will perish!'

"Then the spell seemed to break; he awoke, grasped his pistol, and started up to see dimly through the mosquito curtains of his charpoy the very men of his dream close by. "'I fired all the barrels in succession, Stanley, giving three shots to each, Stanley,' said he, still all but breathless with fierce excitement, 'and I must surely have winged at least one. Look at the blood there.'

"'How can these fellows have eluded my sentries?' said I.

"'But about my mother's voice. Was it not odd, Stanley?'

"'A dream; and in danger you naturally thought of her.'

"But more odd did we think this episode when the next mail brought a letter from his mother, to little Wickets, who showed it to me only. It was dated on the *first* day of the new year, and described a painful dream she had on the preceding night, in which she had seen him in his sleep in a strange place, and on the point of assassination by two natives, one of whom wore a high head-dress, a long beard, and robe; and that in her terror a cry to heaven escaped her, so loud and piercing that she had roused all the household, and she concluded by imploring him to write or telegraph from the nearest station without delay, which we immediately did. 'But what *are* we to think of this strange double dream, Stanley?' he said more than once after long thought.

"'I think we should say nothing about it to any of ours or of the Assam corps,' said I, 'lest they take to chaffing you as a dreamer and ghost-seer.'

"But I must own the coincidence startled me till I had other things to think of, when, at dawn on the morning of the day I shall long remember, a sudden uproar in the midst of

the cantonment roused all to arms—all at least save poor little Wickets, who was stricken down with fever, and had been on the sick-list for a week past. In the dark a body of Bhotanese had stolen past our sentinels and commenced with sharp swords and axes to slash through the tent-ropes, while making a general attack on the inmates with matchlocks, arrows, and slings.

"'Stand to your arms—fall in! Gunners stand by your guns? Limber up!' Such were the shouts on every hand as we scrambled into our ranks in the gloom and obscurity; and while the Eurasian artillery rushed to their cannon, we, assisted by the inlying piquet, commenced rapid and independent file-firing in the direction where we supposed the Bhotanese to be, by the noise of their yells and by the red flashes of their clumsy old matchlocks through the gray morning haze. We kept them effectually in check, and as soon as the light was sufficiently in, and their exact position ascertained, Colonel Campbell, who, like many others, was suffering from fever, charged them at once with the 43rd and ours, and drove them completely off; but not before—led by the Lama priest in person—they made a vigorous attempt to storm his stone-house, in which were our quarters, and the key to the position. We had a vast number killed and wounded, including Lieutenants Story and Urquhart, the latter mortally by a jingal ball, which severed his femoral artery.

"Inspired by the shouts, the din, and the firing, young Wickets, half-dressed, had rushed out sword in hand, but only to be borne back to bed more feeble than ever; and when I returned that night from an expedition on which I had been sent in vain, to protect a bamboo aqueduct which supplied us with water, and which the Lama priest contrived to destroy, I found my little subaltern in a deplorable state. We had so effectually drubbed the enemy that we had peace for some days after this, and I was at leisure to attend to the sick boy—for he was, as I have said, a mere boy, but a genuine plucky English one.

"On my return from the front, when ascending to the room occupied by Wickets and me, I was met by our doctor, with a very perplexed and perturbed expression in his face.

"'How is your patient, doctor?' I asked.

"Ill, indeed, and quite delirious, and I feel inclined to become so too.'

"'Why, Crawford?'

"'I can scarcely explain—I am so bewildered—but seem to have seen a ghost!'

"'Seem to have seen a ghost!' I repeated, but without a smile, as I feared that our surgeon—a grave, sensible, and hard-working medical officer—was becoming, like many others, a victim of the grim fever king, whose abode was among the pestilent jungles there.

"'Listen to me,' said he, drawing me apart. 'All yesterday and all last night poor Wickets has been raving, calling and weeping out at times for his mother, more like a very child than the gallant lad who led the skirmishers through the Chamoorchee Pass.'

"'He is intensely attached to her, I know, and she to him.'

"'He has a photo of her under his pillow, and the likeness between them is marvellous; and though worn by age, her features are remarkably beautiful, pale, and regular,' added Crawford, with a shudder.

"'What *is* the matter with you, Crawford,' I inquired, with growing interest.

"'The boy had replaced the photo under his pillow, and as I retired to the table to make up a draught for him, I saw there was stealing over his face that strange beauty which belongs not to earth; it was the calm, the sublime expression of those who have got their "letter of readiness" for another world than this. Then I heard him saying, in a low caressing voice, "Mother dear, do give me something to moisten my lips; put your cool hand on my temples. I am your own little boy again, who will never, never leave you, mother; and we shall be long, long together now."

"'I was about to approach him with the draught when I dropped the cup in terror and dismay. Disbelieve me if you will, Stanley, but do not mock me, when I tell you that, plainly as I now see you face to face, I saw bending over *his* bed, the wretched charpoy of canes, the figure of an elegant woman, with her face of wonderful brightness, her eyes full of a sublimity, a sweetness, and loving expression beyond my power of description; and I had only time to recognise in her

the woman of the photograph, his mother, when the phantom, the spirit, or whatever it was, faded away.'

"Even while Crawford spoke there were drops of perspiration on his brow, and he added, 'I was so awe-struck that, but for the entrance of a hospital orderly, I believe that I should have fainted; but say nothing of all this to any one, I beg of you.'

"I then told him of Wickets' dream, and how he had escaped assassination the very moment he imagined that he heard his mother's voice. 'All this is passing strange,' said he after a pause, in which he took some brandy-pawnee; 'we can only refer it to coincidence, or that school of physics which is kept alive by tradition, and which, for lack of a better term, we call *animal magnetism*.'

"Then, as if to explain what he had seen, or fancied he had seen, rather to himself than to me, he talked, as the Scots, like the Germans, sometimes do, a deal about the wonderful fibre of physiological relations (whatever that may mean), and the manifestations of a Power that has in view ends far higher, keener, and more beautiful than we could see.

"Certainly I could not see it; but the episode, so recent, enhanced the interest I felt on entering the room where our young friend lay dying among strangers, so far, far away from his English home and all its English surroundings, the beloved Absalom of his mother; and this thought came strongly upon me as I drew near him in that dingy impromptu barrack-room. The furniture there was his camp-bed on one side, mine on the other, with a board-ship washing-stand which had served us both. In one corner stood some red Kedgeree pots for bathing purposes; in another some bottles rolled up in wet straw to keep the contents cool; a couple of bullock trunks, swords and revolver cases, with cheroot boxes, were the rest of the furniture. On the table were vials, some linen soiled and stained with blood, a plate of salt for disgorging leeches, some soda-water bottles, a quantity of rich brown curly hair, recently shorn from the head of the sufferer, the unfortunate fever-stricken lad, whose once round cheeks were hollow and ghastly now, whose head had been shaven by Crawford close to the scalp, and whose pale temples were spotted with red leech-marks.

"Though 'there was but one step between him and death now' he was quite composed, and greeted me with a smile as I took his hand in mine when Crawford left us. 'I am going home, Stanley. I am going home, old fellow. Give me a drink, please. Thanks. Ah, it is some of Crawford's nasty stuff; he might give me bitter beer, as it matters little what I take *now*.' After a pause he added, in full corroboration of Crawford's story, 'I have had such a delightful dream about poor mother. I saw her *so* vividly, *so* distinctly, and with a sweet smile on her face *as she bent over me, with her hands on my brow;* and after kissing me she glided softly away. I hope to have such a dream again. And you licked those beggars at the aqueduct? How I wish I had been with you! though as sub, I am always content to play Horatio to your Hamlet, Stanley.'

"Then his mind began to wander again, and with the full memory of Crawford's recent communication before me, I sat —a little nervously I must admit—in the watches of the night, listening to the delirious mutterings of the dying lad, who seemed to *see* some one that I could not see, and to converse with one whose responses I could not hear. So the metal ghurries clanged, the reliefs went round from time to time, and the hot hours of the breathless Indian night stole on; while occasionally I could hear the strange howl of the wild dog, and the cry of the kyang or wild ass in the adjacent jungles. Fitful lights seemed to gleam redly out of the darkness too; but whether they were fire-flies close by, or torches lit by the Bhotanese in the distance, I was too preoccupied to consider or care about them.

"He often imagined himself in the playing-fields at Rugby; then he would talk to his sisters, and ever and anon, in fancy and in the most endearing terms, to his mother, telling her that she was an angel of goodness, and if he went to heaven it would be through her merits and not his own. He seemed totally unconscious of my presence, and, somewhat hardened though I was by field service, I felt how painful it must be, even to accustomed watchers of the sick, as a writer says, 'when *the mind wanders*—when the soul goes on some wild journey of its own, away from direct human association, yearning for impossible delights, living among flickering

shadows, distorted and amazing pictures that have their origin in some faint magic-lantern of past or present life—when the eyes look at you and do not know you, is there any human sensation of fear that equals the heart-throb that beats under those glances?'

"At last there stole over his face that weird and wistful look which comes only *once* in life—the expression of the death that is so close—the last long earnest glance that is given, as the tongue and lips become powerless and mute, unable to tell either of love, of sorrow, or of repentance. It has been my chance, by land and sea, to behold death in many shapes—in every stage of pain and fear—in all that can render it terrible; but that poor boy's end affected me keenly. Just as the morning gun pealed through the cantonment, and when the white peaks of the Himalayas gleamed like cones of fire against the dark-blue sky, the poor lad expired; and as our post was to be abandoned in haste, no time was lost in having him interred. The hospital orderlies rolled him in blankets, his mother's miniature was placed in his breast by Crawford's directions, and just as the sun rose we buried him amid a clump of giant rhododendrons, and I read the funeral service. We had not a firing party, for gunpowder was scarce, like the other good things of this world, at Dewangiri.

"So severely were we pressed by the enemy, and the general failing to send us succour, we abandoned the post at nightfall, and began our retreat towards the plains of Assam by the Libra Pass; and as we entered it, I remember looking sadly back to the grave where our young comrade lay, and thinking how solemn and lonely was such a tomb; and so, while the planets and the great moon, clear and silvery, came out of the blue depths of the Indian sky to shine over vast tracts of jungle, where the tiger and wild ass lurked, over the domes of Bhotan temples, rivers, and green wildernesses, to us unknown, we pushed on our retreat, which became a calamitous one. When the moon waned and darkness came amid the wildest and most stupendous mountain scenery in the world, a panic somehow seized our men.

"The column lost its way, confusion ensued, and the wounded were left behind to the mercy of the Bhotanese.

The guns were next abandoned, as the Eurasians were unable to drag them; so they were flung down a *khud*, as those tremendous ravines of the Himalayas are named. Our rear-guard kept up a brisk fire on the Bhotanese, who replied heavily with matchlocks, jingals, and arrows. So many of our fellows were hit that, without the fear of being knocked on the head, one could not help speculating on the chances of coming out of the field with the regulation number of human limbs; but after the Lama priest—who was foremost in the fray—was shot down, we were allowed to continue our way unmolested.

"But I am diverging from my story. Two months afterwards, when we were cantoned at the foot of the hills, Crawford entered my tent.

"'You remember the night when little Wickets died,' said he, 'and all that occurred?'

"'But too well,' I replied.

"'Well, here is a letter for him, which I opened *ex officio* as an executor. It is from the curate of their place in Kent, and it would seem that, on the very night and at the very hour he died, *his mother died too*.'

"'Another most singular coincidence!' I exclaimed. 'Poor little Wilmot!'"

"Who did you say?" cried Miss Conyers, in a very startled voice, as her eyes filled with tears.

Now Stanley had gradually been becoming conscious, while proceeding with his simple little story, that the soft eyes of Fanny and her sister had been fixed on him with a concern more deep and eager that it seemed to merit; but he had "scored it down" to the interest that girls usually take in red coats and all the adventures of the wearers thereof.

"O Captain Stanley, *who* did you say?" she repeated.

"Wilmot—Bob Wilmot, whom the mess called Wickets."

"Of the —th Regiment?"

"Yes; I was then in that corps."

"Oh, sir, he was our only brother!" exclaimed the two girls at once.

"Your brother, Miss Conyers!"

"We have since taken that name from an uncle: that of

our family is Wilmot. We were at school in Brussels when all these things you have related took place : we only heard vaguely that poor Bob had died somewhere 'up country.'"

"He often mentioned a sister whom he loved very dearly; but I never could catch her name in his mutterings."

"'Twas I," said Fanny sadly ; "we were nearly of an age, and were great companions. How can we thank you for all the tender commiseration and more than brotherly kindness you have unconsciously told us our poor boy received at your hands! Oh, that dear mamma were alive to thank you!" exclaimed the girl, while choked in tears she took Stanley's hand in hers and, somewhat to his confusion, kissed it.

"How very romantic—quite touching, in fact!" was the sneering comment of Alf Foxley, who stood with his back to the mantelpiece, regarding the scene with a twinkle in his shifty eyes, and genuinely astonished to see that tears were dimming the eyes of Mabel in sympathy with her friend.

"And you—aw—read the Burial Service?" lisped the Reverend Alban Butterley, lying back in his chair, with the tips of his white fingers meeting prayerfully, as if he very much pitied the poor Christian who had it done by one perhaps so unworthy. But Stanley merely bowed to the well-bred "apostle," and wondered how his reverence might have read it while within reach of the jagged bullets and poisoned arrows of the Bhotanese.

Fanny Conyers seemed to feel something of this too, for after his departure she said smilingly to Stanley : "Mr. Butterley is a most agreeable clergyman, who—though you will never meet him, like some, riding straight in the hunting-field, at cover, or shooting well on the 1st--excels in the mild excitements of croquet and afternoon tea."

Little Fanny Conyers was a taking creature, winning in manner and attractive in person, with bright laughing hazel eyes, cheeks round and soft as peaches, with three dimples, one in each and one in her chin, veritable *fossettes d'amour* that seemed to invite the lips of those who looked on them ; and these won for her the name of "Dimples" from Foxley in his saucy way, when among men in the smoking-room or elsewhere. Stanley, somewhat touched by her emotion and

the joint interest so suddenly awakened in each other, making them seem quite old friends in fact, gazed more particularly on Fanny, and began to discover that her soft lash-shadowed eyes of golden hazel were full of beauty, and that her neck, on which her handsome head was so perfectly poised, was fair and slender.

"By Jove?" thought he, "but poor Wickets' sister *is* a deuced pretty girl, with something almost infantine in the innocence of her expression and manner."

Perhaps the *empressement* with which the lovely lips had touched his hand was influencing our officer, who was not displeased to detect a gathering cloud in the eyes of Milly Allingham. All that evening, and repeatedly on the following, the two sisters in general, but Fanny in particular, monopolised Stanley, they naturally had so much to ask and to hear; and to Milly it seemed that with wonderful rapidity "they had become frightfully intimate;" and from that time her bearing seemed alternately to be colder, haughtier, and prouder than ever.

Was she jealous of little Fanny and all her *spirituelle* ways?

Rowland Stanley, in somewhat of a vengeful spirit, certainly hoped so, and yet she was often so prettily petulant that Stanley's heart beat happily at the prospect of taming her or luring her like a love-bird to her cage.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### COUSIN ALF MAKES UP HIS MIND.

MATTERS were still in the balance between our military hero and the object of his wishes; but the tables were somewhat turned on the latter now. Her supposed admirer, Reynolds, was gone. Rowland Stanley seemed rather to affect Fanny Conyers, who coquettishly sang to him more than once in her clear bird-like voice,

"He thinks I do not love him;"

and it was especially provoking to see them acting charades with great piquancy and *empressement*.

Fanny Conyers clung much to Stanley now: she had a hundred questions to ask concerning her dead brother, and confidences to make. Friendship with a girl so attractive was perilous work, and but for the preoccupation of his heart he might have found in her an excellent counterfoil for the real or pretended indifference of Milly Allingham. Though conscious of the advantage perhaps to be derived from her growing pique, he had no desire to widen the kind of breach between himself and the latter.

"Is it platonic affection that is springing up between them?" she asked herself. "No; I am not idiot enough to believe in that. It never existed genuinely between even the married, and is not likely to do so in this instance." So Milly *was* restless, for, though she would not acknowledge it even to herself, he had established an *influence* over her.

She had failed to have even the curate, Alban Butterley, for an *attaché* as she had said, that reverend personage having to visit town on some prolonged clerical business; and save when some of the Hussars, especially Larkspur, with his turfy talk and *Bell's Life* phrases, rode out from Brighton to leave their cards for Seymour, she began to think Thaneshurst somewhat of a "slow" place after all, and her thoughts began to flit after her mother to Wiesbaden and the daily and nightly gaieties of the Kursaal; for there now in the *salons*, where *rouge-et-noir* and *roulette* emptied the pockets of many, the dancers whirl in the waltz, and in the lovely gardens, where the losers blew out their brains, flirtation to any amount is in full progress, with all "the subtlety imported by the experience of the season" in London or at Berlin. She felt in her heart that she admired no man, more than she did Rowland Stanley. How different he was from empty Val Reynolds, with his namby-pamby well-bred talk, and from most of the other men she had met in that mystic circle called "society"! How much more interesting, anecdotical, and engrossing! She was charmed with everything he talked about, particularly his Indian reminiscences. But then Fanny Conyers was enchanted with them too; and Milly most seriously wished that the episode of "Little Wickets" had never come on the *tapis*.

Besides, Stanley, popular everywhere, was especially so among the little circle at Thaneshurst. Dr. Clavicle and Alban Butterley considered him quite intellectual, wonderfully *so* for a soldier. Then why had she refused him? And now his leave of absence would soon be coming to an end. He had already hinted that he would be going soon after a ball that was to be given by the Hussars.

Cousin Alf about this time made up his mind. If he had a genuine fancy in this world, it was for Aimée de Bohun. With her saucy fast ways, her cigarettes, her sealskin jacket and made-up masses of golden hair; her chaffing conversation, often bordering on slang; her green-room anecdotes and raffish companions,—albeit she was such a lovely-looking creature, with all her "making-up," she was much more his style of woman than Mabel Brooke. But Mabel's money was to him her greatest attraction, and he had all the prestige of cousinship, combined with his uncle's great regard for him, on which to base his hopes of success, could Seymour be put aside or weeded out of her head and heart. Moreover, her money would enable him to keep secretly "on the square" with Aimée; for he knew many a fellow in town who found it very pleasant to serve "under two flags." His ideas were very extravagant, his habits luxurious, and money was thus an imperious neccssity with him.

Foxley, now that his fit of alarm had subsided and Tom Seymour was slowly progressing towards convalescence, felt his old rancorous hate return in all its strength, with a regret that in "the spill" at the lane his rival had not received some almost mortal injury—something more serious anyway than a dislocated shoulder. If he feared and detested him before, he detested and feared him more than ever now. "Conscience makes cowards of us all;" but conscience did not quite make one of Alf Foxley, though the police might.

He had hoped to bring ridicule, contempt, suffering, and mutilation upon Tom. Now all the deep-laid scheme, so carefully and secretly carried out, had only ended in making him an object of deeper solicitude to Mabel and of interest to all—to all at least except Mrs. Brooke.

When he occasionally visited the invalid, how little could the latter, or the gallant and soldierly Stanley, guess the secret

and real thoughts of his heart! Yet he would say cheerily and kindly to all appearance, while seeking to hide a secret undercurrent of ill-veiled suspicion, knowledge, and reserve:

"Glad to see you looking so well, old fellow. Smoke, Seymour, smoke; you are dying for a cheroot. Ah, your game arm! Allow me to apply the light for you;" and so forth.

"Every one is very attentive to me," said Seymour, speaking with an effort.

"Old Clavicle, 'my dear sir,' to use his own perpetual phrase, is certainly pulling you through, though he is only one of the red-lamp-and-vaccination-gratis lot of sawbones; yet he is a wonderful fellow, Clavicle; clear-sighted; can see his way through a millstone, uncle Brooke says. Yet I saw a fellow get a worse spill than you some weeks ago."

"Where?"

"At Brighton races. I was then escorting Mabel, of course, on Reynolds's drag:

> "'And there on a high box-seat we sat,
> Together my last beloved and I;
> My gaze was fixed on her dainty hat,
> And hers was bent on the wine hard by.'"

As he sang this verse, Stanley and Seymour exchanged a covert smile, and the upper lip of the latter quivered with anger, though he cared little for the *insouciance* of Foxley now. And often, when all were abed and probably asleep, Tom would lie awake for hours, while the clock on the mantelpiece ticked monotonously and the night-light in a Bohemian-glass vase shed rays of feeble light that made the shadows in his room seem ghastly. But he thought of Mabel with a delight that bordered upon rapture and love—the love he could return so freely; and he strove in vain to dream of her, as the charm of her presence was there, for Mr. Mulbery had informed him that the room had once been hers; thus, perhaps, her soft and peach-like cheek had pressed the very pillow upon which he now lay; and the last nightly murmur on his lips was ever of her. In his ardour he felt that, even were he to die of his injuries, Mabel's love for him would soften the terrors of death. But there was no fear of the latter; he felt himself languid indeed, but daily growing stronger, and with health would come departure and separation.

Though his rival, Foxley, laughed in his heart at what he termed "the superstition of matrimony," in the present instance he made up his mind to adopt it. "By Jove!" thought he, "I'll make my running while the course is free and she is no longer under the immediate influence of that cad's society, the despatch-box and red-tape quill-driver. To-morrow I shall propose to Mabel, come what may, Mere hints, like some I have given, won't do now," he exclaimed aloud, while surveying himself in the mirror and performing heavily, almost viciously, on his somewhat obstinate red hair with a pair of ivory-handled brushes.

Foxley had gone in for a heavier book than usual upon certain races. To use his own phraseology, he had "put a pot of money on three good platers, one of which came in second, the others nowhere; so he would propose for Mabel in form. Nunky Brooke was a kind old pump and would back him up to any amount, as all was yet kept dark about Aimée and her brougham."

Accordingly next day, when luncheon was over and the family circle was separating, he followed Mabel into the library, whither, luckily for his purpose, she had gone alone in search of a book, and without much preamble, in an anxious and exceedingly clumsy way, he asked her to be his wife, adding that he was sure such a union would give satisfaction to both families—to uncle Brooke especially.

We shall not detail this interview, save in so far as to say that Mabel, though irritated and yet excessively amused, was not surprised, as much of Cousin Alf's previous line of conduct had led her to expect the declaration he had just made.

"Please, Alf, don't make a fool of yourself, and never speak on this subject to me again. It is impossible; and though I can never, never love you in the fashion you wish, I know you too well to think that you will act 'the blighted being' in consequence of my most decided rejection."

Extricating her right hand, of which he had possessed himself, she forgot all about the book for which she had come; and leaving Alfred Foxley with unuttered curses on his quivering lips—describing her as "a cursed hard nut to crack, a fool," and so forth, "only fit for Hanwell!"—ran laughingly and yet with a palpitating heart out of the library. Foxley's

declaration and proposal failed to excite either gratitude or pity, even in the smallest degree, in the heart of Mabel. Five words will explain this.

With all her beauty and charms of manner *he did not love her*,—in truth he loved no one but himself,—and hence the true ring of passion was not in his voice when he addressed her. He had no love for her, but he would have had a great deal of pride in presenting such a wife to the world on one hand, while seeking, no doubt in vain, to make the fair Aimée believe that he had been compelled by circumstances, his father's will and so forth to marry her. Pausing at the door of the conservatory, and fearing he might follow her and renew the scene in the library, she pondered over her cousin's abrupt proposal, and thought tenderly of the poor fellow upstairs to whom she had given her heart—her own gentle-voiced and gentle-eyed Tom; and at the moment Milly joined her.

"Mabel, darling," exclaimed the latter, surveying her with some surprise, "why are you so agitated?"

"O Milly, how can I tell you!" said Mabel with a little hysterical laugh. "I have just had a proposal!"

"A proposal?"

"Yes; and you will never guess from whom."

"Not from—from Captain Stanley?" she asked, with a too palpable change of colour.

"Oh, fie, no, Milly!"

"From whom then?"

"Cousin Alf."

"And you accepted him! Then I shall figure as a bridesmaid. But what about poor Mr. Seymour?"

"Milly, how can you jest so! But come this way; here is Captain Stanley, and I am so excited," she added, putting an arm round the waist of her friend, who said, laughing:

"As for me, I shall not think of matrimony till I am spoken of as a *ci-devant* pretty woman—for I daresay I *am* pretty—reduced, as Miss Pardoe says, to a *tour de tête* and metallic teeth."

As they passed into the conservatory Stanley, while approaching, heard the mocking surmise, which he knew well was meant for his particular ear.

"I do hope Alf won't worry me again!" exclaimed Mabel as she rehearsed to her friend all he had said. But Alf made

all his arrangements, ordered Pupkins to have the mail-phaeton ready, Mulbery to have his traps packed, was off from Thaneshurst before his absence at the dinner-table was remarked, and took the evening train to town to visit *la belle* Aimée, promising his uncle, however, to be back in time for the 1st of September, leaving—he thought of it with double hate and fury—the field entirely to Tom Seymour.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### HOW MR. BROOKE BLUNDERED.

ALF was gone now; his gray-green or neutral-tinted eyes—how well she remembered their fierce expression in the library!—were no longer there to watch her when she lay in wait for Dr. Clavicle—in wait so slyly, dear girl!—to ask with an air of carelessness, to conceal her affectionate interest, about the progress of his patient day by day, for now her whole soul was absorbed in the sufferings of Tom Seymour.

Her favourite flowers in the conservatory were forgotten now; her pet love-birds that were wont to feed from her rosy lips and nestle in her white bosom—reminding one of Greuze's famous picture—were left to the care of Polly Plum, her maid; and her favourite pad, which was wont to whinny over her shoulder, follow her like a spaniel, and daily look for a tiny feed of corn from the velvet palm of her little hand, had to content him with the care of Pupkins alone, that paragon of bandy-legged grooms, for Mabel had a special care now that filled her anxious heart. She abandoned herself to her love, wilfully, as it were, with eyes half-closed, striving to forget that which could not be forgotten, and seeking hard—oh, so hard, poor girl!—to teach herself that, by not looking destiny too steadily in the face, a time would come when her parents might allow her to become the happy little wife of Tom Seymour.

How she longed to take the place—but that was not to be thought of for a moment—of the cold-hearted and methodical yet fussy professional nurse whom Dr. Clavicle had provided for Tom, and whom she was quite convinced must be a genuine "Mrs. Gamp;" but when accompanied by her father and Stanley, poor Mabel *did* see her lover, all pillowed and

propped up for the occasion, she was shocked to behold the change in him as she took in hers his thin and wasted hand, he looked so ghastly and white, his rich brown hair was shorn short, and his handsome moustache and beard clipped quite close. She shrunk back timidly too, as the avowal she had made on the day of the catastrophe made her very reserved, for the great secret of each heart was known to the other now.

"O papa, he looks frightful!" she exclaimed with an irrepressible sob, after they withdrew. "Can he—will he live?"

"Live? of course he will! Tom is one of those tough fellows that don't die easily," replied the old gentleman cheerily. "What a kind little puss you are to be affected so! But before a week is over you may give him a drive round the park in your pony-carriage."

"O papa, but mamma mayn't approve."

"I know she wouldn't; but I'll take the blame, and choose a day when she is at a Dorcas meeting or some such thing. Why should not we be all kind to the poor fellow—old Tom Seymour's son? Lord, girl! when I think of the games Tom and I used to have when we were in old Scrawl's office in Birchin-lane!"

Consequently, a few days after Tom was convalescent—able to be "up and about," as Dr. Clavicle had it—Mr. Brooke ordered the pony-carriage from the stables. Tom was handed therein by Stanley, and with Mabel, blushing under her veil, as a charioteer—blushing at her own thoughts and the whole situation—he departed for a little drive at a time when Mrs. Brooke and her three young visitors had gone with the carriage to the Pavilion at Brighton, and also to get some minor requisites for the forth-coming Hussar ball, and ere their return, the *result* of what she would have termed "Mr. Brooke's blundering arrangement" was accomplished.

Both at first, though their hearts were beating lightly with the purest happiness, were somewhat silent for a little space; and after the beauty of the day, the loveliness of the grass and trees, the mildness of the air, and the easy action of the pony-phaeton had been fully admitted, it became necessary to talk of something *else*.

Tom thought he had never seen Mabel look more lovely;

her colour was heightened, and there was a shy glance in her eyes that enhanced their beauty of expression. She was, as usual, most becomingly dressed in morning costume, with perfectly-fitting driving-gloves, the daintiest of hats on her pretty head, with a ruby-coloured drooping feather that at times swept the cheek of Tom as the wind waved it, and her veil was tied under her chin—the fashion then; but by the time they had gone twice round the park it had somehow been loosened, no doubt that she might converse with more ease.

Tom Seymour began rapidly to feel the impossibility of not referring to the subject with which his heart was full. "It was so kind of you to—to grieve for me so when my horse threw me," said he.

"How could any one fail to grieve?" she answered, blushing deeply; "it was a terrible time!"

"A sweet time to me, Mabel. I called you Mabel then; oh, let me do so now—now and for ever!"

"Tom!"

Her head fell on his shoulder, and the wind blew up her veil, and a blindness seemed to come over Tom as his lip met hers. In day-dreams and night-dreams how often had he thought of and longed for the time when they might—as I think it is a song has it—

> 'In one long, long and loving kiss
> Concentrate all love's ling'ring bliss."

And now the time had come.

They were very silent those two, for with all the joy of the present they could not shut their eyes to the doubt and gloom of the future, after a time; but at first, entranced in love, they were forgetful of all the world—of all and everything but themselves and the wild joy of the time—a time, alas, too brief and fleeting.

The reins had fallen on the backs of the ponies, who jogged on unguided through the leafy dingles of the wooded chase, and ultimately, ere Mabel roused herself and remembered where she was, they had stopped and betaken themselves to quietly cropping the herbage, as well as their bridle-bits would permit them.

Rapture and weakness, consequent to his recent suffering, filled the eyes of Seymour with tears as he gazed from time to time into the calm, loving, and candid orbs of Mabel, and felt that she was his own Mabel now. "My own—my own, and I have won you at last!" exclaimed he in a low voice, as he caressed her face between his hands.

"Tom—Tom, I do love you very dearly. I always loved you, and, amid my terror in the lane on that dreadful day, the —the secret escaped me. How strange, Tom, to think that the first declaration should come from *me!*" she added, with a blushing smile that was delightfully shy and coy.

And this was the dear and candid girl that he had often heard Val Reynolds and others aver in their parlance "was meant for some big fish," she whose face now nestled in his neck.

After a time Mabel began to remember that which Seymour had forgotten—that some eyes unseen might be upon them. She resumed her parasol-whip and reins, and again the pony-phaeton made the circuit of the park, the very stateliness of which brought practically home to poor Tom the rashness of the love to which they had abandoned themselves; and they began to talk, not always as young people in the noon and flush of love will talk of their past hopes and fears or their present joy, but of plans for their desperate future—a future to be passed in eternal celibacy, of course, if the Fates—*i.e.* Mr. and Mrs. John Brooke—were unkind.

Stanley, with Miss Allingham and the Miss Conyers, could be seen at intervals, through openings in the coppice, at croquet on the sunny lawn before the house. The drive was fortunately over before "mamma," who had returned, knew precisely where Mabel was, and when she reined up at the *porte-cochère* she absolutely fled to her own room, and a valet gave Tom the assistance of an arm to his; but there was a strong expression of timid consciousness in Mabel's face that day, and she quailed under the scrutinising glance of her mother while nervously discussing the forthcoming Hussar ball, what was to be worn, and who were sure to be there. When the usual time came for the ladies to retire to the drawing-room, Mabel put her arm round the waist of her friend, and said: "Kiss me, Milly darling; I am so happy!"

Then Milly by these words knew *all.*

Already had Tom's engagement-ring—one that had been his mother's—encircled her "engaged finger"—the fourth, as the thumb always counts one in arranging this mysterious hoop; but Mabel had to wear her glove over it, or otherwise conceal it among her many rings from "mamma." As for Mr. Brooke, honest man, he was ignorant of such vanities.

And now, after the late tumult of happy thought, as Tom lay, feverish and weak—for he had used his lame arm more than *usual* during the drive—on the sofa in his room, came the time for agitating reflection. Love had been mutually avowed and promises of faith exchanged, beyond a doubt; but how would all this end? Ay, there was the rub!

Her parents—their consent was so hopeless of attainment; and he thought they might with justice bitterly accuse him of treachery and abuse of their hospitality in obtaining the love of their daughter unknown to them. And he thought, moreover, this guileless fellow, oh, were Mabel only poor, or had she never known such wealth, even with his small means (and those vast resources in the future peculiar always to youth), how happy could they be in some snug little rose-covered cottage at Richmond or Staines, Brixton or anywhere else. Hopes and dreams embodied their waking life, a life of joy; and how pleasant would be even the dull routine of office work, when he knew that on returning Mabel's face would meet him smiling at the garden-gate! Dreams, dreams, as yet!

Mrs. Brooke took especial good care that there should be no more work with the pony-phaeton, in spite of her husband's reiterated assertions that it "done Tom so much good, that drive had;" and from that day he recovered so fast that Dr. Clavicle's professional visits ceased. He little knew that one smile from Mabel Brooke, one glance of her magnetic eye, or one touch of her pretty hand, were worth all the specifics in the London Pharmacopœia.

The contents of the last box from Mudie's (like the best flowers in the garden) were always culled for Tom, who knew precisely the passages which Mabel's pencil had marked for his attention. Ere long he was allowed to descend to the drawing-room, where she could shed the light of her beauty,

her sweetness, and tenderness around him, and play and sing to him, while they strove to shut their eyes to the fact that he must leave her some day, and the delicious present would irrevocably become the *past*. So Foxley had brought about a *dénouement* he could not have anticipated, and the end of which he could not foresee.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### STANLEY'S RESOLVE.

AND now came the 1st of September, the day but one before the military ball. Badenoch, Larkspur, and others were coming to Thaneshurst, but Tom had no fear of rivalry with any one, whatever Stanley might have. And Alfred Foxley also came, with a fresh batch of photos of Aimée to be admired in secret, and with pleasant recollections of jolly but rather expensive dinners at Richmond, Star-and-Garter luncheons, and picnics with "fast" people on the river, or tiny dinners with her and some others of the ballet at the Welsh Harp, with "dry fizz," a cutlet or so, and cucumber cut as thin as a gossamer-web, winding up by a supper at the Gaiety after the green rag was down.

There was not much of importance to our story occurred on the otherwise important 1st of September, but much that was so came to pass on the evening thereof and the following day.

The First came gloriously in, with unclouded sunshine and a gentle genial breeze. At Thaneshurst there were a billiard-room and smoking-room, but no gun-room. Those who came thither for the grouse- and partridge-shooting had to bring their own arms and ammunition. At breakfast there was a fair gathering of lovers of the trigger, who had been invited by Mr. Brooke (though he never handled a gun himself), including the Master of Badenoch, Major Larkspur, young Craven, and others. And disquisitions that were most mysterious to the ladies ensued "anent," as the Scots say, the various specialities and qualities of pointers, retrievers, and setters, and of firearms, the "pin" breechloader, the merits of the Henry-Martini rifle, central-fire, and all the rest of it, till the very *whirr* of the partridge seemed to rise to the listener's ear.

All had donned generally a good style of shooting-dress, but Foxley wore an elaborate tweed-suit, with knickerbockers and innumerable pockets. He thought he was perfect, even to his Brighton pebble sleeve-links set in gold, and did not hear Larkspur's comment to Craven :" How that snob is got up, by Jove !" said the major, with his glass in his eye.

The breakfast proceeded merrily and was somewhat protracted, and most of the conversation ran on sporting matters —of preserves where birds were fat and trapping easy for poachers ; of sport in different countries, from knocking over partridges in Kent to ptarmigan in Scotland and Norway. And it was on this day that Tom Seymour for the first time since his mishap made his appearance in the dining-room, but looking pale and thin.

"How well you look, Seymour, after it all! Not a hair of your coat turned, as Pupkins would say," exclaimed the hypocritical Foxley, as he shook his victim's hand, and then seated himself beside his uncle, to whom he always paid assiduous court—more, indeed, than he was wont to do to Mabel.

"Tom seems quite another man, Alf," said old Mr. Brooke, eyeing his young friend kindly. "It is wonderful how fast he has picked up since the day he drove out."

"So it would seem, uncle," replied Alf, with a slight grimace ; while he muttered under his red moustache, "Hang it! he and Mabel must have been making strong running together, from all I have heard. However, I'll bring *her* to book yet, if I can. Never venture, never win !"

How little did he think that the ring with which he saw her toying from time to time during breakfast had so recently been slipped upon her pretty finger by the rival whose influence he hated and feared so much, and at whom, more than once, she smiled covertly and *so* consciously, with a soft fond look in her violet-blue eyes, and a quiver on her sweet sensitive lips ! For there was now established between the twain that delicate relation, known to themselves alone—save Milly Allingham—which both understood so well, and which made them both so supremely happy. How different was her state of mind now from anything she had ever before experienced ; and, oh, how unlike was her "own dear, dear Tom" to all the other men in the world !

She had said all this to Milly again and again, when both were supposed to be sound asleep in their respective couches at night; and had expressed quite as often, that she "had no patience" with that young lady's coquetry and caprice in her relations with Rowland Stanley; and was always affirming that, whatever "papa or mamma might assert or say," she would never, never marry a man she did not love. People never did those kind of things now, except in novels, and seldom even then.

"I am so sorry, Alf, that poor Tom can't go with you to-day," resumed Mr. Brooke to his amiable nephew.

"Better not. We shall be safer without him."

"How? Why?"

"I suppose the amount of his experience in sporting is potting pigeons at the Scrubs, or finches on Barnes Common," replied Alf, who found it impossible to resist a sneer. "And even if he had read up Colonel Hawker on 'Shooting' and Hans Busk on the 'Rifle,' he would be a source of peril; for if his shooting is like his riding—"

"My friend Tom rides very well, and sits his horse like a gentleman," struck in Stanley, who, though seated opposite, heard, amid the buzz of the breakfast-table, the remarks of Foxley.

"Perhaps so, Captain Stanley; he may ride along a road very well, but he tumbled off, you see, the moment he attempted to ride as if across country."

All unconscious of these remarks, and that Foxley perhaps would not have been sorry to put a charge of Number 6 into him, if he had been able to go with the shooting-party, the subject of them was intently listening to every remark, however trivial, that fell from the lips of the girl he loved. "Your ball, it seems, is sure to prove a brilliant success," said she to the major, who was busy with some grouse-pie.

"Ya-as," he replied, with a drawl; and then, turning to Milly Allingham, he added, most probably by chance, "By the way, our friend Val Reynolds is coming to it."

Milly coloured in spite of herself, and merely bowed to the major. No more passed, but there seemed an inference here, a conjunction of persons or ideas, that irritated Stanley; and still more was he to be so ere the day was over. And now

the party prepared to set forth. Sandwiches were stowed away in silver boxes, and pocket-pistols were filled by Mr. Mulbery, though a luncheon was coming, in addition, in the pony-phaeton; and as the sportsmen prepared to set forth, Mrs. Brooke was not ill-pleased to see that the Master of Badenoch was much disposed to linger with Mabel.

Why did not Mrs. Brooke, with all her adoration of the Peerage, "go in" for the cultivation of the Master? it may be asked. The truth was, that, with all her vanity and selfishness, she would have shrunk from intrusting her only daughter to such a husband; his character for wildness and recklessness was serious, and his debts were averred to be overwhelming. With her, riches were only the means to an end—yet not the end of her ambition—to see Mabel's name among the Peerage, or even the Baronetage; to be able to talk of "my daughter, Lady Mabel;" but "mistress of Badenoch," even had the Master (one day to be a viscount) been a desirable *parti*, she could not understand. It was Scotch perhaps; but any way it sounded strange to an English ear. Badenoch, like Larkspur, had a handsome fortune in prospect; yet both made no secret in the regiment of the trouble they had to make both ends meet in an extravagant corps, and how often they were reduced to flying kites and taking up each other's bills.

In other respects young Badenoch was after her own heart. Had he not, like the Lord of Glenroy, "a family tree on which all the birds of the air might have roosted," claiming, though a very matter-of-fact Hussar, a descent from that Lord of Badenoch who was Scottish ambassador at the Court of Louis IX., and the surety of the marriage of his king with Johanna of England?

But she very little knew that in secret he was a very aristocratic "snob," who, while "polishing off" her good old husband's preserves, skilful enough to kill his five-and-twenty brace of birds per day, and enjoying his hospitality, agreed with Larkspur, that "Brooke was a rum old file; kept horses though he never rode them, and cellars full of tip-top wine though he drank very little of it. His bunk at Thaneshurst was," they admitted to each other, "a deuced improvement upon Brighton Barracks."

No doubt its stately rooms were so to theirs, with hard-wood or doubtful mahogany tables, stained with the rings of long-since emptied tumblers of grog and champagne-glasses; littered with dog-eared *Army Lists*, and yellow-covered French novels; by torn bills of the Brighton Theatre, old kids, billets-doux from actresses and sewing girls, unpaid bills, meerschaums, cigar-ashes, and soda-water bottles, and such like samples of bachelor life in H.B.M. barracks; though we have been in many a subaltern's room, furnished with elegance, where such samples were *not* to be seen. From the terrace, Mr. Brooke, with his old face radiant with pleasure, accompanied by the ladies and Seymour, saw the sportsmen set forth, and proceed laughingly and noisily down the avenue, to where the beaters and keepers awaited them at the corner of a coppice; and Foxley, as his uncle's representative, took charge of the arrangements.

"Badenoch," said he, "you will go to the top of the cover on the right. Captain Stanley, will you please go by the left? Major Larkspur and I will keep in the centre till we emerge in the field beyond."

"Vewy good," lisped the Master of Badenoch.

"Ah," said Alf, "you'll find this something better than your 'Tommiebeg' business in Scotland."

The other sportsmen were all neighbours, including the Reverend Alban Butterley, and, knowing the ground, required no instruction; and after passing through the belt of trees, the far extent of stubble or grass fields, interspersed here and there by gorse-covered knolls, spread in the sunshine before the sportsmen, the guns began to bang off here and there as the brown coveys rose whirring upward, and the serious business of that great epoch, the First of September, began in earnest, in a way that would have astonished our forefathers; for does not Smollett tell us in *Sir Lancelot Greaves*, as a momentous circumstance, that one of his characters was so deadly a shot that he could shoot dead a crow upon the wing!

As it was less to enjoy the sport than to cast himself once more into the society of Milly Allingham that Rowland Stanley had come to Thaneshurst, to chronicle all the various feats of the party and the number of birds each "knocked over" is no part of our plan.

Stanley was a fair average sportsman, and more than once had potted his tiger from a howdah, and even from the branch of a tree in India. He was one of the best shots of the party, and frequently elicited the praise of the keepers, by the mode in which he selected his birds, and the clever manner in which he killed them; but his mind was wandering away from the partridges; the excitement of the sport, the spirit of emulation, the desire to excel in the work of slaughter, to parade before the ladies the biggest bag of the party, the sylvan beauty of the scenery, and the clear brilliance of the day—all failed to exhilarate him.

Milly's bearing perplexed, and the trivial remark made by Larkspur, about the ball of the morrow night, irritated him. Had her name been coupled with that of Reynolds amid the mess-room gossip and banter of the Hussars? It almost seemed so; and when luncheon was brought by Mulbery in the pony-phaeton, and the shooting-party gathered to refresh their "inner man," and lay grouped on the grass by twos or threes, between the intervals of discussing chicken and ham, raised Yorkshire pies, bitter beer, hock, dry sherry, and champagne, he had to endure some such remarks as these, made not always in low tones:

"Yes," said Lieutenant Craven, assenting to a remark of Larkspur, "I agree with you that Miss Allingham is a girl of unexceptionally good style, but rather coquettish and all that sort of thing, don't you know."

"I don't say she is a regular flirt," replied the major, while leisurely rolling up a cigarette; "but there is no doubt, I believe, that she *did* make uncommon strong running with Val Reynolds of the Guards."

"Reynolds again!" thought Stanley, with a silent adjective hovering on his lips.

"He is the heir to a title, you know," said Craven; "and, being so, I cannot understond why the little Brooke girl didn't try to have her innings in that quarter."

"Perhaps she didn't want to rival her friend; besides, one may see with half an eye that she is devilish spooney on that city fellow Seymour, don't you know."

"And I'll go bail," said an Irish captain, striking in, "that the mammas of both studied Burke and Debrett well before

they came out in London—pass the sherry, Craven—and as far as Reynolds and she are concerned, the little birds say—"

These slipshod remarks were gall and wormwood to Stanley, and yet he feared that Milly Allingham had laid herself open to them, so he turned off, without waiting to listen to the gossip of "the little birds." Noon was long since past now, and it was proposed to work their way back again, through the fields, towards the belt of coppice, in which, or about the gorse near which, many of the coveys were supposed to have taken shelter; and as the party neared Thaneshurst Stanley was thankful that the great epoch, the First of September, was over at last.

To have left *before* that day, when he had come ostensibly and apparently expressly for the shooting, would have been impossible without exciting comment or suspicion that something was wrong. Indeed it would have been offensive to Mr. Brooke. But now Thaneshurst was intolerable to him; so truly it is, that some men in loving a woman must have all her heart or none.

Ideas of rejoining the regiment again occurred to him; and, at, all events, as he had no intention of returning for the short remainder of his leave of absence to empty London, as the first movement in his new plans, he telegraphed to Tattersall that very night to sell a pair of nags he had left with him; and he would leave Thaneshurst on the morrow—but for where he scarcely knew. Anyhow, the off-hand remarks of the Hussars had called to memory all his past suspicion and raised his pique, his pride, and jealousy to fever-heat. Many other guests were coming to Thaneshurst, and no doubt, when once he was gone, she would soon forget that such a fond fool as himself existed. Yet, when the morrow came, so unstable was he of purpose that he changed his plans once again—unstable, at least, so far as Milly was concerned.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### UNSTABLE.

ON the evening of the first, a tolerably large party were assembled in the drawing-room, and in Mrs. Brooke's boudoir,

a charming little bijou apartment, which opened off it. The past day's sport, the prospects for to-morrow, and the coming ball, formed ample subjects for discussion, and Stanley felt that the game of cross purposes between him and Milly Aliingham was becoming more and more entangled.

She had a grudge against him, that was all the stronger because it was utterly unreasonable. "He asked me once to love him, and I certainly trifled with him," thought she; "but why, when he has so many opportunities here, does he not ask me *again?* Perhaps I would not trifle with him now."

But this, in her pride of heart, she would neither communicate nor admit, even to her friend and gossip, Mabel Brooke; and because Stanley's regard seemed to have cooled down into mere friendship since he came to Thaneshurst, on this evening she revenged herself by flirting and coquetting with the somewhat ponderous Badenoch, till Stanley was, to use a common phrase, "wild;" but in all her doings Milly had much of what a writer calls "that *aplomb* which is part of the armour of a woman of the world."

Badenoch had a head of carefully-parted hair, was handsome, but not overgifted with brains, and as the only son of a wealthy viscount was not supposed to require them much; yet to Araminta, Fanny Conyers's younger sister, he seemed quite a hero—"an Agamemnon," as she said, without having the least idea of what the king of Mycenæ was, but thought she had seen him at Madame Tussaud's in Baker Street; and she quite envied Milly when she saw the two sitting somewhat apart from all the rest in Mrs. Brooke's tiny boudoir, which was charmingly furnished with blue silk and maple-wood tables and consoles covered with expensive and grotesque china, jardinières of sweet-smelling plants, with jets springing amid them, and basins with goldfish darting about, with baskets hung in the windows; and in one corner a beautiful little whatnot littered with crested note-paper; in another a cottage-piano, over which hung a water-colour of Thaneshurst, done by Mabel.

Here, then, when Stanley handed Fanny Conyers to the piano, and turned the leaves for her while she coyly sung her inevitable

"He thinks I do not love him,"

he found Milly and the Hussar laughingly discussing love and matrimony, and the latter regarding her with a somewhat puzzled expression as she concluded something she was saying by adding, "You know Dean Swift says, humorously, that 'married people, for being so closely united, are but the apter to cease loving; as knots the harder they are pulled break the sooner.'" And then, thinking perhaps she had gone quite far enough, or not wishing to leave the pair at the piano entirely to themselves, she crossed the room and joined them.

Stanley looked on her with something of sadness, as he thought that after to-morrow night he should see her no more, as he had resolved to leave England—most certainly Sussex; he would brook the torture and suspense to which she subjected him no more. And even now, when gazing on her wonderful beauty, as she bent over Fanny, it seemed to him strange and sorrowful that a time must come when it must fade and she would grow old, that it should utterly pass away. But are we not told in ancient story, that the most difficult office imposed upon Psyche was to descend to the lower regions, and bring thence some portion of Proserpine's beauty in a box; and that when, impelled by curiosity, she raised the lid, there came forth but a vapour, which was all that remained of her wonderful loveliness?

The two happiest persons there, though they barely interchanged twenty words, were Tom Seymour and Mabel Brooke. In the earlier days of her girlhood, many men, then as now, came about Thaneshurst and the house in Park Lane; yet she never wondered, like other girls, who would propose, or if they did whom she would marry. It was Tom Seymour—always Tom—who had filled the girl's heart. They scarcely spoke, but their eyes were eloquent enough, as the watchful Foxley detected. Though, without an iota of genuine love for his cousin, and with what heart or soul he did possess full of his fair friend Aimée, Alf Foxley looked very darkly on the secret intelligence that too evidently subsisted between his cousin and "that cad Seymour," especially when he recalled the blunt cold brevity of her refusal of his —to say the least of it—very matter-of-fact proposal. Yet he resolved to try his fortune with her once again, perhaps

when returning together from the Hussar ball; but she never gave him the wished-for opportunity.

"One is necessarily cautious of using strong terms in these days of persistent repression of *all* emotions," says a writer. By the same rule we have frequently to model our features to suit the occasion; but in this art Foxley did not much excel when roused. He had imbibed a good deal of wine at dinner, and now there was an evil glare in his eyes and an inflation of his nostrils with rage, as he leaned against the velvet-fringed mantelpiece; his teeth were set, his hands involuntarily clenched, and he would have struck Seymour before Mabel's face but for the utter outrageousness of such a proceeding.

"What is this Tom Seymour tells me, Captain Stanley," said Mr. Brooke, suddenly approaching the trio at the piano, "that you are going to leave us after the Hussar ball?"

"I fear that I must, Mr. Brooke," replied Stanley, while Milly looked at him with a startled expression in her dark eyes, an expression which, with all her tact, she failed to conceal from him.

"After one day's shooting?" exclaimed Mr. Brooke.

"I shall then have had two," replied Stanley, smiling.

"My dear sir, the thing is not to be thought of."

"I must, indeed, with a thousand thanks to you, Mr. Brooke, think of decamping so soon, as I leave England at an early period,"

"I am so sorry to hear this. My dear Milly, could *you* not prevail on our friend to change his mind?"

A little flush shot over her face as she said: "I fear Captain Stanley is too thoroughly a roving Englishman, who is no sooner in any place than he begins to scheme how best to get away from it, and never knows where his happiness really lies; so I fear, Mr. Brooke, my poor attempts at persuasion would prove fruitless."

And with a sweet smile, while bowing and fanning herself, she passed out of the boudoir, and took a seat in the other room, beside the handsome curate, Alban Butterley. In her reply, her glance, and manner, there was something that exercised the mind of Stanley. That she had started with a palpable dilation of the eye, and hence displayed some emo-

tion, however slight, when Mr. Brooke announced his speedy departure, was evident; that a flush had crossed her cheek when asked to persuade him to stay was evident also, but that might arise from annoyance. There was something of a taunt in terming him a "roving Englishman," who knew not where his own happiness lay.

In all this there was much that, considering their past and that scene in Connaught Terrace, might invite and lead to an explanation; but on that night Stanley did not seek it, and certainly she gave him no opportunity of doing it, as she always contrived to have a tolerable group of men about her chair. He knew not what to think of it; but after reflecting on the past, and what he had heard from the Hussars incidentally, though it might all be mere mess-room gossip, he felt unalterably fixed to leave Thaneshurst.

Never again would he speak to her on the subject of love; never again, when his soul seemed to tremble on his lips, utter to her such words as he had once done, to be treated with mockery. But poor Rowland Stanley could little foresee all the morrow was to bring forth.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE WHITE CAMELLIA.

WE have said that Stanley changed his mind once again, and it came about in this fashion.

The 2nd of September proved a day of incessant rain, falling steadily and perpendicularly in bucketfuls; even the most enthusiastic sportsman would not have gone abroad; the white mist rolledup from the hollow coombs and shrouded the green downs, and the stone gutters of the terrace at Thaneshurst were gorged with water. The gentlemen betook them to cigars, billiards, loading cartridges, dozing over *Punch* and the *Graphic*, going over the stables, and so forth; while the ladies amused themselves as best they might, in the final arrangement of their ball-dresses, the selection of suites of jewels, and happy anticipations of the coming festivity.

So determined was Stanley to leave soon that he spent part of the forenoon in packing his portmanteau, that he might start, almost at a moment's notice, after the Hussar ball; and

feeling somewhat more at ease, now that his mind was sternly and resolutely made up, he rambled into the spacious conservatory that he might enjoy a cigar, and the luxury of thinking without interruption ; but there, as the Fates would have it, he came suddenly upon Milly Allingham, seated, in a lounging attitude, upon a little marchioness, so immersed in a book that she did not hear him approach, and he was able for a few seconds to study the exquisite grace of her pose, the contour of her head, neck, and shoulders. She was evidently absorbed in what she was reading, for Milly, we have said elsewhere, was an intellectual and well-read girl. At last she became conscious of who was near her, and closed her book with a smile and a bow.

" I fear I have disturbed you—so sorry," said Stanley ; " but I came here to smoke and think alone, after—after—"

" Not knowing what to do with yourself all forenoon."

" Nay, Miss Allingham, I have been busy getting my things packed, prior to my departure."

" And," said she, after a little pause, " and is it really true that yesterday you telegraphed to Tattersall about your horses ?"

" Yes."

" Then you don't return to London ?"

" Not for many years, probably."

There was again a startled, earnest, and searching expression for a second, but a second only, in the upturned eyes of Milly, and then she said, smiling,

" I wish you a pleasant journey."

" Say voyage, rather, Miss Allingham, as I join my regiment by sea. But what book is this you are so intent upon ?"

" It is a work by Moreri, a very scarce one, which I found in the library, containing an essay on the passion of love ; and he seems to think that love and hate may exist in the same breast for the same person at once. Do you believe in such a paradox, Captain Stanley ?"

" I do," said he, and then became silent ; for, in the peculiar relation in which they stood with regard to each other, to discuss this subject was indeed to approach perilous ground, to enter a battery fully mined.

Milly evidently felt this, for she avoided his eye ; and then,

by a pretty blunder, as if to court the very scene that might ensue, she opened the volume, and said, "The writer here tells us, Captain Stanley, that there is none of all the passions that has employed the thoughts of moralists and philosophers, and perhaps of almost every other species of writers, as that of love; but whether this is an argument of its excellence, he is unable to determine."

"The best incentive to love is merit," said Stanley, as he stood irresolutely twirling his moustache, thinking how lovely she was, and that he had perhaps been premature in his packing, "but I remember to have read that M. St.-Evremond says that true love resembled ghosts and apparitions, because every one talked of it, but few or none had ever *seen* it."

Their eyes met for an instant, with a glance there was no mistaking. A rich colour came into Milly's cheek, and a light shone in her dark eye; the colour passed away; she became paler than ever; but the joyous light remained; and she said in her heart, with coquettish triumph, "He loves me, he loves me still." Then turning, a little nervously, once more to her book, she said hurriedly, "There is a terrible story here of the power of love, which I shall tell to you in English."

"Do please," said he, leaning over her, so close that his moustache almost touched the coil of her back hair.

"It is an old, old story, of the sixteenth century. He tells us that Julietta de Gonzaga, a lady descended from one of the most noble of Italian families, was so celebrated for her beauty that the fame of it reached even to Constantinople; and induced Chereddin Barbarossa, Admiral of Soliman II., and Viceroy of Algiers, to attempt to carry her off, as a present for his master, but failed. For some time—so vain and coquettish was she—she declined the offers of many royal princes. At last she became the bride of Vincent, the Duke of Mantua, who, in time, grew tired of her, and forsook her. Her love now turned to hatred, and she became almost mad with the desire for revenge; and, confident in the wonderful power of her beauty and attraction of manner, by the assistance of his confessor, she contrived, after a time, to have an interview with the recreant duke, whose race ended with

Charles IV., during the war of the Spanish succession. She had left nothing undone or unstudied by which to dazzle and allure him; and though vengeance rankled in her heart, she reproached him so sweetly and so touchingly for his falsehood to her, that the Duke of Mantua felt all his love return in greater force than ever; and he told her, with the utmost tenderness, that he loved her still, and her only. She affected to doubt this, and to disbelieve all that he might urge, till she required of him, as the most terrible proof of his love, a solemn *denial of God*, which he had no sooner done, than she planted a dagger in his heart. She then stabbed herself, and died above his body, in a room of the Gonzaga palace at Mantua—still pointed out to the curious."

"People do not go such terrible lengths nowadays, Miss Allingham; yet love may change, or even turn to positive dislike, under certain influences."

"The author of *Destiny* asks, 'Whence is it that two persons, who seem to have been born only to hate each other, should, under any circumstances, actually love each other?'"

Love and hate—his own idea again.

"I do not know; I am no casuist, Miss Allingham," said he, endeavouring, for a time, to conceal alike the tenderness of his voice and eyes; "but we seem to have suddenly become involved in a rather curious discussion—on the subject of love—a subject which you treated very lightly, and dismissed very summarily, when I had last the—shall I call it pleasure?—of speaking to you on the matter."

She did not see his face, and the measured nature of his words piqued her.

"Ah, you refer to London," said she, relinquishing her book for the fan that hung at her girdle, and which she proceeded nervously to open and shut. "The truth is, Captain Stanley, we were too much together, or rather, I should say, seen too much together, at musical *fêtes* in the Botanical Gardens, the Albert Hall, the opera, and ever so many dances."

"Do not say so," he urged; but Milly felt the necessity of defending herself when she was not sued, and that necessity roused her pride. "I would all those past joys were to be done again; and yet—"

"Perhaps, better not."

"Yes, perhaps," said he, "but why?"

"People said—I scarcely know how to tell you what they did say—" she resumed, and then paused, with a coy smile on her downcast face, while she toyed with a beautiful white camellia, which she had selected from the many around her, to wear at the ball.

"Pray tell me."

"Well, from being seen so much together, that—that we were engaged; and *that* was such nonsense, you know, Captain Stanley."

"Would it had not been so!" thought he in his heart, but was silent. Was this singular admission a lure of the coquette, or a *flout?* He feared it was the latter rather than the former.

He sighed, and said, while standing erect and ceasing to lean over her: "Miss Allingham, you are to me a species of sphinx, and I am no Œdipus; but only a very plain and matter-of-fact fellow."

"You mean that I am an enigma?"

"Yes; you have treated me very ill; but I shall trouble you no more, as I did when last in London."

"I am not a girl to break my heart for the loss of any man," said she, fanning herself vigorously, and still resolved to stand on the defensive; "but I do think that after all the admiration you expressed for me, you have put a slight upon me for Fanny Conyers."

"Miss Conyers!"

"Yes, Captain Stanley."

"How could I put a slight upon you?" he urged softly; "did you not laughingly, mockingly, treat my earnest declaration to you in London; and since then, how have you behaved to me?" he asked, almost in anger, as many little episodes came to memory; and she, though intensely gratified by the turn the conversation was taking, beat the floor with a little foot, too piqued by the trifling attention shown to another to surrender even now.

"Listen to me, Miss Allingham, Milly," said Stanley, placing a hand gently on her shoulder, while all his great love for her gushed up in his heart, which forgave her all

her coquetry: "That I love you dearly you know well; that in you life centres; that my whole soul is bound up in you. Must all this be said in vain? Have you no answer for me?"

Of all the many who had admired or dangled about her, none had ever spoken thus; yet she was still silent. Either the moment of triumph and victory, so long in coming again, or joy at the avowal of his love—both perhaps—deprived her for a time of the power of speech; and her soft lids drooped under the passionate earnestness of his handsome dark eyes; while, misinterpreting her silence, he spoke again, in a voice that was tremulous:

"O Milly, think well. I speak on this subject for the last time. 'The marriage ring,' says one of the sweetest of our writers, 'is not a toy of triumph to be passed from one hand to another. It is the emblem of soul for soul, and heart for heart, for ever, or it is nothing.' I ask you, Milly, darling, will you be my wife?"

His great tenderness did indeed move her; but ere she could reply, in his impetuosity he spoke again, with something emphatic in his tone, while fearing that her silence or delay arose from the knowledge that Reynolds was to be at the Hussar ball.

"My time is short in England now, and if I am ever to be more than a dangling admirer, one too treated somewhat like a fool, I must have some sign of hope in the future from you, or this night we part for ever. Do, darling, learn to know your own mind ere it is too late. You are agitated. Do not answer me now, unless in the affirmative; but if I am to hope that you have accepted me, wear this white camellia at the ball to-night in your corsage, and bestow it on me, as on him you acknowledge to love best in the world."

Smiling and blushing, with moistened eyes, she gave him a quick glance, that seemed to him one of unutterable tenderness, and placing the camellia in her bosom hurried away; for footsteps were now heard in the conservatory.

There was more of romance, a wholly unthought-of element, in Milly's nature than she would have acknowledged to any one; and she liked this new idea of the camellia very much; while Stanley, though his lips had never touched even her hand, felt so certain of her love, from the brilliance of her

parting smile, that his heart expanded with pure happiness, and he seemed to tread on air, and felt very much disposed in general to bless the chance that had led him into the conservatory, and Moreri's work in particular, for all that his story "anent" love had led to.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE HUSSAR BALL.

STANLEY did not see Milly after she left him. He was to dine that evening at the Hussar mess, and afterwards join the Thaneshurst party at the ball, which was to be given in the famous Pavilion; and when reverting to the idea of the camellia she was to wear—it might be *not* wear—there were times when he thought he was rash to leave the matter thus with her; but that in the conservatory he should have pressed her for a final answer. Then, anon, he deemed it better as it was.

Never had Stanley enjoyed less a dinner-party or night at mess than this—yet the dinner was, of course, perfection, from the clear soup and sherry to the coffee and maraschino—his mind was so preoccupied. Larkspur and some others, who were on the ball committee, had been lunching and "refreshing" themselves all day, aad they canvassed their fair guests in a somewhat free-and-easy manner; and the major, whose utterance was a little "feathery," more than once spoke of Milly Allingham in a jaunty fashion, that roused Stanley's anger highly. He was the more irritated that, owing to some blunder of Larkspur, the vehicle he had ordered was very late in reaching the barracks; and Stanley could little foresee *all* that this delay was subsequently to cost him.

"Here it is at last," said he, as a mess-waiter announced it, with others. "Eleven o'clock! By Jove, Larkspur, we shall be very late; you especially as one of the hosts."

He flung himself into the vehicle, and with three of the Hussars drove off to the Pavilion. Never before had Stanley felt such emotion, excitement, joy, and hope about a mere ball, and never did he see so little of a ball as of this one eventually. Never did that expensive foible of H.R.H. George, Prince Regent, look more gay than on this occasion. The

rain had passed away, the sky was blue and starry, and against it the cupolas, the bulbous-shaped dome of the central façade, and the smaller domes at the wings stood up sharply and darkly defined. From the windows flakes of brilliant light fell on the trees and shubbery without, and gay figures were seen flitting to and fro. Within and without the edifice seemed instinct with life and sound. Vehicles, many of them stately equipages, were streaming along the garden front, depositing those invited to the ball, and passing out at the opposite entrance, and the crash of military music announced that the ball had begun, and some way made through the programme.

Rowland Stanley had been at too many regimental and garrison balls to be much impressed by the military display made by the Hussars on this occasion; yet all-preoccupied as he was with thoughts of Milly Allingham, he could not help being struck by the singular aspect of the famous Pavilion and of the rooms set apart for dancing, refreshments, and promenading.

In the vestibule adjoining the western portico there was of course a guard of honour of Hussars on foot, with sword and carbine; sergeants even posted at all the doors as guides; there were fountains of perfumed water, bouquets *ad libitum*, and the sub-lieutenants were in attendance with packs of engagement-cards for the guests, all duly stamped with the Prince of Wales's feathers (the regimental crest).

The magnificent music-room in the northern wing, with its walls covered with crimson and gold and representations of scenery said to be taken from the neighbourhood of Pekin, was set apart for dancing. And here, of course, were trophies of arms, amid which the guidons and kettle-drums of the regiment occupied a conspicuous place; and from under the great dome, the swell of which is covered with scale work in what is termed "green gold," eight great lustres shed a flood of light upon the dancers.

Already the room was crowded, yet more guests were pouring in; the number of uniforms, the exquisite toilettes, and the great beauty of most of the ladies, made up a scene, in such a place, of wonderful gaiety and brilliance. Officers of all corps were there; guardsmen from town, artillery from

Woolwich, linesmen from Chatham, Aldershot, "the Alma Mater of the British *militaire*," and a fair sprinkling of naval men too.

The third quadrille was over as Stanley—who came of course in full uniform—learned from his card, and the Hussar band struck up a waltz by Strauss—*Die Fledermans*—and amid the whirl of dancers, gyrating like a human zeotrope, he saw Milly flying past with the arm of Val Reynolds round her. She was dressed entirely in white; a costume so becoming to women whose hair, eyes, and eyelashes are dark. In his anxiety to see whether the camellia was in her bosom, he scarcely heeded the circumstance of her dancing with Reynolds.

"How late you are, Stanley," said Foxley, who was not much of a dancer, and was lounging against Westmacott's famous chimney-piece, with a leering smile in his shifty eyes, that had a trick of avoiding the glance of others, while affecting that which sat very ill upon him—aristocratic apathy; "all the cards must be filled up by this time."

"Miss Allingham promised to keep several dances for me."

"Time you saw about them, old fellow; for she has been going the pace with Reynolds ever since he came into the room, at least so far as the round dances are concerned."

Heedless of this, Stanley made his way through the maze of the room to where they were pausing for a moment, she flushed, breathless, and palpitating, on the strong arm of Reynolds, who was in his Guards uniform, and whispering away to her with great *empressement*, she the while fanning herself, and looking—as Stanley thought—most radiantly beautiful; but ere he could address her they were off again, "with flying feet," she waltzing with a wondrous grace and singularly effortless ease; and as they passed him, he heard Reynolds say laughingly: "Oh, yes, there are loves and loves, just as there are kisses and kisses."

Stanley could distinctly perceive that she had *not* the white camellia in the front of her corsage, nor in her glorious dark hair, nor anywhere about her dress. He was not accepted by her, but rejected, and she was whirling in the dance without it. Had she lost it? for she could not have forgotten the flower. Another moment and he saw it! *Where?*

In Reynolds's button-hole! How dared she mock him thus? was his first thought. This was some portion of what "the little birds" have had to talk about. He remembered —ay, savagely remembered—that less important affair of the little bouquet, on the night — or morning rather — of the Brookes' ball in Park Lane. It was but a trifle; yet it and other "trifles, light as air," now made a tremendous storm in the breast of Rowland Stanley, and he drew back towards the door amid a group of officers who were lingering there.

Milly and her partner paused again, and her eyes certainly swept the room, as if in search of some one. Suddenly they fell on Stanley, and seemed to sparkle anew with pleasure, as she made a wave with her fan towards him; but he simply bowed, and turned away. There was a haggard expression of sorrow and reproach in his handsome eyes, that was fated to haunt her for long, long after, when it was all too late to repair the mischief done.

The flower, the gift which she was to bestow, as an emblem to him whom she loved best in the world, was now openly bestowed on another. He retired from the room. His sense of mortification, disappointment, wounded self-esteem, and rage at being so befooled was intense. The last element enabled him, perhaps, to support the others better. She had purposed and prepared, with coquettish malice aforethought, this *coup*, to show how little she cared for him, for his passion, or the avowal of it. Had any lover ever been so cruelly and deliberately insulted before?

A deadly sickness of the heart mingled with his anger; and from the past he turned away with unavailing regret. Rude though it might be, he would return to Thaneshurst no more. He should never have gone there at all. "Ass, dolt, idiot!" were the smallest epithets he applied to himself. Thaneshurst! he would loathe the recollection of it. Brighton, too, was hateful to him; for there his life had been blighted and his love ridiculed; but in a few hours the early train and he should have left it far behind.

He would leave England, and never again look upon the fair false girl who had so befooled him. Like one who was stunned or in a dream, and with the distant music of the band still ringing in his ears, he made his way into the yellow

drawing-room, which had been set apart for refreshments; and then, draining a great goblet of iced champagne, began to consider his movements anew: not that his mind in the least wavered from his fixed plan to leave Brighton without delay, with a brief note to Mr. Brooke, though the old gentleman was at the ball (which he deemed a dreadful bore, but endured for Mabel's sake). And Mrs. Brooke, too, among the other matrons and chaperones of the county, was in all her glory; and so many men of rank, and even better position than Badenoch, were present, and had inscribed their names on Mabel's engagement-card, that, for the nonce, her maternal brain was somewhat distracted. "How loud the old party looks in her purple moiré!" was the ungallant remark of the Master of Badenoch to some of his friends.

In his fury and anger the unfortunate Stanley felt disposed for more iced champagne than he usually imbibed; and while having it, and waiting till a vehicle was procured for him, he was compelled to listen to some of the remarks of those about —remarks which rather added fuel to the flame of his anger.

"What, not dancing—*you*, Stanley?" said one of the Hussars.

"Ah, why have you left the room already?" added Larkspur, who came forward with Foxley.

"For the same reason, perhaps, that you have done so, major," replied Stanley.

"Thirsty, deuced thirsty; and I can't get one turn with *la belle* Allingham."

"Why, major?"

"Her card is filled up already, she says; yet I could have sworn I saw vacant places on it. But no one ever has a chance with her, don't you know, when Reynolds is near."

Larkspur twisted his moustache angrily, and drained another goblet of champagne, of which he had already taken more than enough.

"I'll cut out Val yet; propose to the girl, and all that sort of thing," resumed Larkspur, whose utterance was becoming thick; "but I must think and smoke over it first. No, no, Larkspur, my boy; you can't afford to chuck yourself away. What do you say, Foxley—do you think if I asked her to be Mrs. Larkspur, she would say no?"

But the other did not condescend to reply. He was sulky.

Tom Seymour was not there, at all events; and he could neither dance with, nor dangle about, Mabel. But Alf was little or no dancer; and she was absorbed by others. He felt that he could, more than ever, be easily dispensed with; hence he became more moody as the night wore on. Mabel he looked upon as his own special property; "and no end of other fellows" had swept her away.

At last Stanley quitted the yellow drawing-room. Foxley thought he had returned to the dancers; but he had quitted the Pavilion, and driven away. Thus, when Reynolds came, a few minutes after, in search of him, he was nowhere to be found. Had he chosen to remain and show indifference—that emotion so difficult to feign when one feels but love—he would have found no difficulty in procuring any number of brilliant partners. He was always sure of good introductions; and moreover, Stanley, if a little less fashionable-looking than Reynolds, had more the bearing of a soldier and a man—he carried his head so well; and his hands, though white and square, were well formed and muscular. Moreover, he had upon his breast the V.C., for an act of valour in the expedition to Bhotan; whereas all Reynolds's campaigns had been in the vicinity of Windsor or Wormwood Scrubs and the Long Valley.

And now to explain the mystery of the white camellia, and how Milly Allingham was not, in reality, the heartless coquette she appeared to be. How little could Stanley have supposed that, at the very moment he gave her that almost stern glance of sorrow and reproach which so greatly perplexed and bewildered her, Milly, on looking down, suddenly missed the camellia from the front of her dress! In dancing, it had fallen from her bosom unseen; but Reynolds had adroitly picked it up, and placed it, all unknown to her—as she was perpetually looking about for Stanley, and had, as Larkspur asserted, many vacant places on her card reserved for him—in a buttonhole of his coat.

"My camellia!" she exclaimed, as the flush incidental to the waltz passed away, and she became very pale indeed. "Oh, please restore it to me, Captain Reynolds!"

"It should have been a scarlet one for a white dress, Miss Allingham," said he; "but do permit me to retain it, in memory of to-night, and of the belle of the Hussar ball."

"No, no; do please give it me," said she, so impetuously, as she held forth a tremulous hand, that Reynolds gave her back the camellia. But as, with quick and impatient fingers, she was endeavouring to replace it in the corsage of her dress, it dropped to pieces; and the white petals of the fatal flower fell on the well-waxed floor.

Alarmed by all this, for she had really meant to do all that Stanley wished her, she now complained of being weary, and requested to be led to the side of her chaperone, Mrs. Brooke. She then asked Reynolds to look for Rowland Stanley. The tall Guardsman good-naturedly obeyed her; but soon returned to say that he had left the Pavilion, none knew how or why.

Well did Milly know *why*. Her heart was wrung with genuine sorrow, perplexity, and alarm, for she really loved Stanley now, with all the passion of which she was capable. To-morrow, on the first moment she could find available, or when he asked for an explanation—if his pride and love would permit him—she should explain the whole affair. To this she felt Stanley was every way entitled. But a sense of dread hung over her; and though she danced every dance that was in the programme, she did so mechanically, and without the least sense of enjoyment. She had an emotion of oppression, rather, and heard with intense annoyance the wonder Mrs. Brooke expressed, from time to time, at the absence of Captain Stanley, whom all supposed to have been taken seriously unwell. Too true it is that many an unseen, unspoken, unwritten romance, many a moment of mortification and misery or of triumph and joy, may be acted amid such scenes of gaiety as that ball, which Milly and Stanley were fated long to remember.

At last the rooms began to empty, and the successive rolling of carriage-wheels under the domed entrance that leads to Castle Square announced the departure of guests. "How tired I am of all this, Milly, and of these heavy dandies, and of their got-by-rote gallant speeches, with awful pauses between!" said Mabel, as their party passed outward by the vestibule; "and how often I have wished that Tom were here with us!" she added in a lower voice.

Both girls had long been weary and anxious to go; but not

so "Mamma Brooke, Madame le Nouveau Riche," as Larkspur was in the habit of impertinently calling her at mess. She had been thoroughly enjoying herself. She had not the —to her—incubus of Tom Seymour's presence to compete with those who filled Mabel's card with their names, and claimed her hand for every waltz; men, like Larkspur, who had "won their spurs," and others, like Reynolds and young Badenoch, who had upon their macassared heads the reflected glory of as many generations as any one else of course, but bearing rank and title.

At length they, the Thaneshurst party, were all in their carriages, and bowling homeward by the Lewes road, in the darkness of the early morning; and Milly, reclining, shawled, in a corner, was very silent; while ever and anon she repeated to herself, "in a very few hours now he shall know all."

But as they drove down the avenue to Thaneshurst, she remarked, with something of foreboding, that the room occupied usually by Stanley was involved in darkness.

Mr. Mulbery rang the breakfast-bell somewhat later than usual on the morning after the ball, and all the party assembled, save Stanley. Unwearied by the late hours, the heat, and the exertion of such continued dancing, the four girls looked unusually fresh, bright, and animated; and the ball was being discussed in all its phases and features, with countless bits of airy gossip, recollections of tender and gallant tomfooleries, of hand-pressing and shawling; while Mr. Brooke, who was sick of the subject, and Tom were anxious to have a look at the morning papers, which the butler had duly cut and aired for them.

On this morning Milly wore a robe of pink cashmere and quilted satin. Her pale loveliness was now all the paler, in consequence of her own thoughts; but the colour became her so well. Could Stanley but have seen her then! Ever and anon surprise was expressed at his sudden disappearance from the dancing-room. Fanny Conyers felt somewhat indignant with him, as in his preoccupation of thought he had passed her twice unnoticed in the ball-room; but Fanny, so *petite* and *spirituelle*—"Dimples," as they named her—nathless her too apparent fancy for the absent one, had "danced

and flirted," as Foxley said, "with some three or four fellows to any extent and with great *espièglerie*," yet she felt piqued, for Stanley had never once asked for a sight of her engagement-card.

"Letter for you, sir," said Mulbery, presenting one to Mr. Brooke upon a salver; "just come by the morning post, sir."

The old gentleman adjusted his gold spectacles on his nose, and on opening the missive, exclaimed: "God bless me, how singular! Why, Martha dear, we have lost Captain Stanley!"

"Lost him, John?" said the old lady, pausing over her coffee, while her daughter and Milly exchanged quick glances of intelligence, for the two friends were quite in each other's confidence.

"He is off to join his regiment in the West Indies—some sudden order, I suppose; and a man seems to have come from Brighton for his luggage last night. He says some rows are expected among the Maroons. He sails from Southampton in the *Queen of Britain*. 'Pray excuse me,' he adds; 'and with best wishes to all your family circle, believe me,' &c. The Maroons! who or what are they?"

"They are some kind of savages in Jamaica, the descendants of the Spaniards and negroes," said Miss Araminta Conyers, who was fresh from school.

"The *Queen of Britain*!" said Milly Allingham almost mechanically to herself; "I thought his regiment was in Bermuda."

"This departure seems surely very unceremonious, Martha dear," said Mr Brooke.

"Ah, but young men are not what they were in my days, John."

Mr. Brooke smiled brightly at the implied compliment to himself; but it was soon pretty apparent to all that Milly Allingham was sorely *distraite*, and her eyes wore a sad, dreamy, and pensive expression she would not have been inclined to admit. Yet this was often their state when their long and beautiful dark lashes were cast down, though when animated their concentrated expressional power was very great, for hers were eyes which, as some one says, "would either see too much or tell too much, unless they were under some remarkable control."

The ball was over; it had ended thus untowardly for him and for her; and this had been the "midsummer-night's dream" to which both had looked forward the preceding day, after that sunset confabulation in the conservatory. How suddenly, after all the brilliance of last night, a pall, a cloud-curtain, had fallen between them, "it might be for years, it might be for ever!" Too probably the last.

"I had too much champagne, no doubt of it," whispered Alf to Seymour; "but for all that I can't help thinking that your friend caved in somehow, and left the Household Brigade in full possession of the field. Perhaps it was a case of 'how happy could I be with either,' and all that sort of thing."

It was not often that "Cousin Alf" was in the habit of whispering to Tom (but he found the impossibility of repressing a sneer), and the latter eyed him in rather grim silence, but vouchsafed no reply, and merely thought "how seedy" his rival looked after last night at the Pavilion.

Breakfast over, Milly complained of feeling ill; there must certainly be thunder in the air; so she retired to her room, accompanied by the gentle and sympathetic Mabel, who loved her so; "and," says Lockhart truly, "what a goodly thing is a beautiful girl's love for another girl!" "He has gone, Mab darling," said she, sobbing, with her face on her friend's shoulder,—"gone with the conviction that he has been tricked and fooled by a hollow-hearted creature, and you know that I am not so. He can never be undeceived now. And, O Mab, I had ever so many vacant places on my card kept specially for him, that we might have some nice long dances together; and so I had to tell fibs to ever so many tiresome men!"

Oh, could she but hear his voice once again, and feel the touch of his hand, or see his gaze bent lovingly, eagerly, and tenderly on her, how different now would be her tone and bearing from what they had been in the silly evil past time! The man with whose love she had trifled, while it was actually shedding a nameless charm over her existence, and whose presence had given a rosy colouring to the merest events of every-day life, was now lost to her; so the passion, real, terrible, and deep, the love so long deferred and so long coquetted with, had taken possession of Milly's heart when too late.

Too late, for now he was gone for ever! Even could she explain now, he could not return for a week without exciting speculation. The die was cast, and in his mind she must ever be viewed through a medium so unlady-like in bearing, so heartless and insulting, that her heart was torn and her pride revolted at the contemplation of it.

Val Reynolds could little know the evil influence he had in the affairs of these two, and no doubt would have choked with laughter, and made the Guards' Club ring with the story of how he had scared Stanley off to the West Indies, by interfering with "a boshy school-girl crotchet of Milly Allingham about a camellia. Don't you know—by Jove! ho, ho!—Stanley's not a cavalry-man, but only in the *Feet*, don't you know?"

In her sudden revulsion of feeling and emotion of genuine shame she almost loathed poor Reynolds, whose gallantry in picking up and wearing her white camellia with such *empressement* had been the cause of all this pain to her and Stanley.

"Poor Rowland!" she loved to repeat again and again in varying cadence; then she would cover her sweet face with her lovely hands and fall once more thinking. But no line of action was left to her now, and, as if to add to the poignancy of her regret, she heard in the drawing-room Fanny Conyers tinkling on the piano and singing,

"He thinks I do not love him."

How terribly pathetic it seemed to her now!

"He thinks I do not love him,
He believes each word I said;
And he sailed away in sorrow
Ere the sun had left his bed.
I'd have told the truth this morning,
But the ship is out of sight;
Oh, I wish these waves would bring him
Where we parted yesternight!"

Though little Fanny's execution was somewhat inferior to Madame Sainton-Dolby's, every word sunk deeply into the reproachful heart of Milly. To ease the agony of her friend's spirit, Mabel made Tom Seymour telegraph an explanatory message to Stanley, addressed to the ship at Southampton. A reply came back about noon. The *Queen* had quitted the

tidal dock early that morning, and was now bearing down Channel.

*Sailed!* The brief telegram came to Milly's heart like a sentence of death; for none suffers so much from the passion of love as a coquette when attacked by it. Gone, to return no more—to her at least. Strangely and capriciously as she had treated him, the knowledge that Stanley loved her, would propose again, and be accepted by her with all his tender, delicate, and elegantly-done attentions, which, though so unobtrusive that none save herself actually knew of them, had rendered him necessary to her as a part of herself and of her daily existence. But now all was over between them, and henceforth their paths in life would be lonely and far, far apart.

The evening post brought a brief farewell letter to Tom, written by Stanley after a night that had been sleepless, save "a few moments of semi-delirious unconsciousness, a very travesty of Nature's sweet restorer."

"I implored of her that the flower might be her gift to the man *she loved best in the world*," ran the note; "and behold, Tom, it was in the breast of Val Reynolds. Thus did she mock and insult me, after all!" He added that his nags were already at Tattersall's; his uniform, &c., were with him. Other things he had elsewhere could be sent after him or to the dépôt. He was decidedly in light marching order and a desperate mood of mind.

Tom felt intensely grieved by his friend's resolution; but, all things considered, it did not surprise him. He knew the pangs of doubt and fear he had himself endured, but he should miss him sorely; for Tom was proud of having such a friend and companion as Rowland Stanley. And so the long and dreary day—a day that seemed twelve months in length—passed away. Night and silence came at last, and Milly sobbed herself to sleep, with Stanley's brief letter under her pillow.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CLIPPER-SHIP.

AND now to return to our fugitive.

It seemed all like a troubled dream to Rowland Stanley

when, after in hot haste substituting mufti for his uniform, and after, with tremulous hands and throbbing temples, he consulted that mysterious volume *Bradshaw*, and getting the last train for Southampton, he found himself on board the clipper-ship *Queen of Britain*, and actually quitting the tidal dock astern of a strong steam-tug, while the hands were aloft getting the canvas loose to make sail on her as soon as she should be out in fair way. Morning was already far on, his letters had been despatched, and now the tall octagonal spire of St. Michael, the Corinthian turret of All Saints, with all the mass of busy Southampton — its streets, docks, and shipping—were sinking in the haze astern, and soon a run of twenty miles or so saw him off St. Helens, the famous rendezvous for our ships of war in fighting times, and then the *Queen* was hauled up to bear down the Channel, with the chalky headlands of the Isle of Wight upon her starboard beam rising so picturesquely amid mist and sunshine.

To Stanley the events of the last sleepless hours appeared all like a phantasmagoria, and that they must have happened to some other person and not to him, or that he must have lost his identity ; and yet withal, in the quickness of decisive action, in motion and rapid change of scene, there was at least some relief from the bitter emotions that seemed to corrode his heart and consume him. Never, until now that she was lost to him for ever, had he known how deep were his love and passion for Milly Allingham.

To Stanley's mind she had long been the embodiment, in purity and refinement, in beauty and intelligence, of his *beau-idéal ;* a dream which he had long conned over ere he met her, and worshipped in his moments of dreamy enthusiasm, for times there were when he did so dream. He had met this idol at last, only to find it rudely shattered in the end, and that his idol proved to be but clay after all, a mere "girl of the period."

And as he leaned over the quarter, and saw the bright waves dancing in the sunshine as they ran merrily past towards that England where she dwelt, he muttered under his moustache, with a quivering lip, "Curse her double game, her heartless coquetry, her whole desire by false encouragement to deceive and befool a poor fellow who loved her, not wisely but a deuced deal too well !"

Then his thoughts reverted to the ball. All those handsome devils in uniform whom he had seen hanging about her he cared nothing for—those candidates languishing for her hand and begging a flower from her bouquet, a flower to be prized above all the treasures of the earth—had he not been guilty of the same gallant tomfoolery with other girls scores of times? But it was the damning fact of the white camellia —the sign on which so much hinged, and all his destiny hung—that rankled like a barbed arrow in his heart. "The old antagonism between love and duty" did not exist in his case, or rather was reversed, for Stanley was only anxious to plunge into the latter as anodyne to the former, and to become oblivious of the past for ever.

We have mentioned in our last chapter that Milly thought the gallant —th Foot were in Bermuda, and Milly was right; but in his confusion, Stanley got up that story or hint about the Maroons (without considering that they were in Jamaica), to account to Mr. Brooke for his sudden and mysterious evanishment from that abode of light the Pavilion at Brighton, an edifice which he thought he would have good cause to remember with peculiar disgust for some time to come.

Had he been too weak or too precipitate? he would sometimes ask of himself; "and when a man's pride undertakes the task of combating his passion," says a writer, "the struggle is likely to be a severe one, and none can tell on which side the victory may lie."

Anyway, thanks to Stanley's decision and the good ship *Queen*, Captain Thomas Parker, they were certainly separated now. "Why should I pine for her who cared nothing for me?" he thought; "love should beget love, if it is to exist at all. Does fate so narrow my choice that Milly Allingham, and Milly Allingham alone, must be all the world to me? Can my mind receive no other impression, my heart no other love? Bah! I shall get over it, I suppose, in a little time."

But he did *not* get over it in a little time.

With all his anger and bitterness of heart, could Stanley have seen Milly, at the very moment he was watching the evening sun sinking behind the cliffs of old England, lying flushed and fevered on her pillow, with the rippling masses of her dark-brown hair pushed back from her throbbing tem-

ples, a strange sad light in her dark eyes, her hot hands clasped at the back of her handsome head, till she threw them with her snowy arms passionately forward to clasp, not him but vacancy, how joyfully, how rapturously he would have forgiven her. But it might not be, and the clipper-ship sped on.

Captain Parker was a handsome fellow, about forty years of age, and a very good specimen of a genuine English seaman, with curling brown whiskers, clear and merry dark eyes, and a gentlemanly bearing; and he and his mates affected a kind of naval uniform, so far as blue coats and gilt-anchor buttons went. He was hospitable and kind; but in common with the passengers (one or two planters and a supercargo or so) bound for Jamaica, he thought Stanley decidedly the most moody and unsociable young fellow he had ever met in the form of a military officer—at least for a time.

All went pleasantly on board, and the *Queen* had a fine run down the Channel before a fair wind, and the last they saw of home was the most southerly point of England, the Lizard Head with its lighthouses, and the columnar rock named the Bumble, round which the white waves were boiling. It was the evening of a lovely day, and Stanley without a sigh saw the promontory melt, as it were, into the sea. The sinking sun shone gaily along the western waste of waters, over which a soft breeze came. The ship had a cloud of square and fore and aft canvas upon her, all white as snow; the decks were nearly as white; the ropes were all tidily coiled away in their proper places, or over the belaying pins; the boats on the booms and davits were all covered with Russian duck; the entire ship looked scrupulously clean, and every bit of brass shone brightly as the two carronades on the quarter-deck, where they were retained as signal guns. As the vessel rolled occasionally the tall spars seemed to sweep and trace the sky with their points; the canvas bellied out taut upon the breeze; and the blue waves, each just tipped with a snowy crest, seemed to run past her rejoicing.

Stanley, we have said, saw the last vestige of England vanish without regret; but he could not help reflecting on, or imagining what his emotions might be, when he beheld the white cliffs again—how changed he might be in thought and

hope and purpose, and what might happen to them *both* in the interval; for, somehow, on this evening his mind was more than ever full of Milly. "Pray God I may not act like a fool!" thought he. "Is my whole life to be swayed by, and bound up in, this heartless girl, like that of the mooning spooning hero of the novelist's stock-in-trade? Why *am* I so miserable? Is Mildred Allingham an element so completely essential to my happiness? If so, why was she not my wife ere now? Am I not better without one so heartless, so full of vanity and coquetry, that twice—at such a crisis—she could trifle with my happiness and her own, if, indeed, she ever considered either? Poor Tom and his Mabel! I wonder what they are about now. He can't be much longer at Thaneshurst, I fancy. Bah!" he would add, as the old idea occurred, "while I am broiling at Bermuda, the London season will be on again, with breakfasts and balls, its sunny races and river parties, and groups riding in the Row; its Richmond gatherings and Greenwich dinners, its illuminated Botanical Gardens, the Opera, the theatres, and all the thousand-and-one means of spending time and money; and at such a time, what am *I* that she should think of me? So *vive la bagatelle*, and welcome the shore of 'vexed Bermoothes!'"

But it was *not vive la bagatelle*, nor welcome Bermuda, for too surely had genuine and honest Rowland Stanley left his heart behind him. His anger faded out, and sincere regret that she had acted so alone remained with him, long ere the north star and other planets associated with home and boyhood sank astern, and other constellations rose fast ahead nightly as the swift clipper-ship sped to tropical regions.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### FUTILE REGRETS.

APART from the assertion that sudden military duty had summoned Captain Stanley to the Caribbee Isles and waters, as his letter stated—a summons easily enough given in these our days of telegraphy—poor Mr. Brooke and Mrs. Brooke were in a state of mystification as to *what* had happened at the ball between him and Miss Allingham. They could not

have quarrelled even as lovers (which they did not suppose them to be), as they had not been seen for an instant together; and to have attempted to explain the affair of the camellia would have been useless to minds constituted as theirs were.

Though rather prosaic and unromantic, Mr. Brooke, on consideration, saw, as he said, "with half an eye that there must have been something up, something wrong, some hitch between Milly and the captain; and I'm sorry for it, Martha dear," he continued, polishing his bald pate till it shone as if varnished; "he's a fine young fellow—one any girl might be proud of; but it seems to me that she never knows her own mind. Ah, Martha, girls weren't so in my time," he added, taking her chin between his finger and thumb as well as he could, for it was a pretty plump one.

He missed Stanley's society too, for he was very adaptive and could converse with any one on almost anything; and now the old gentleman pottered about alone, giving as usual, floral directions to Digweed the gardener, directions which, if followed out, would have insured the destruction of everything. Luckily for the horses, he always steered clear of the stables, where Pupkins reigned supreme, and would brook interference from none.

Stanley had glided into love from simple admiration at first; but Milly had been lured or surprised into it in spite of herself, and the passion had taken possession of her heart and soul. She knew enough of life and of mankind to feel sure that, with appearances so much against her, Stanley could not esteem her; that, much as he might love and admire her, without esteem no man's love would live long, though passion might—certainly not a year; and this conviction filled her with sorrow, anxiety and alarm.

In his loneliness of heart, in reaction, or in revenge, might he not marry another, perhaps the first girl he met on board ship? And people were so apt to fall in love on board ship, she had always heard. She found herself wondering whether there were any lady passengers with the *Queen*, and whether the women of the Bermudas were pretty. She had—in the world, in "society"—heard of men and women making such marriages every day, and thus too often causing a dreary void and vacuum in all the life that was to come.

She thrust from her *these* thoughts, but they would come again and again. "Amid other scenes and other people," she thought, "he will soon learn to forget me—it is only natural, after all that has passed—to care for me no more, to hate me, perhaps; and then how soon and easily may others teach him to love them!"

She was scarcely conscious of what she thought or muttered when alone, or with Mabel Brooke, to whom she confided all. "Gone, gone!" she would repeat; "he will love me no more, and in my heart of hearts I loved him so. I shall soon be as nothing to him—nothing! But will it be so? Yes, too surely, too surely; and I have deserved it all by my pride, petulance, and coquetry. Poor Rowland! dear, dear Rowland!"

Other times there were when she thought, "If he had cared for me—cared for me at least so much as I fancied he did, so much as I did for him," she added, sobbing, "he would not have left me so silently, without a word; so sternly—was it sternly or sadly?—oh, yes, sadly, yet abruptly; and so swiftly to put the sea between us for ever? He would else have given me one chance more. But did I deserve it?"

And so for hours the humbled coquette would wearily and drearily ponder. To her, after all the power she had wielded, it seemed difficult to realise the fact that Stanley was gone, beyond the power of recall or of explanation. No word of forgiveness could ever be heard now; no word of love again from him whom she valued more than all the men in the world; no hope of a future meeting; and all this had been brought about by her own folly, and a wretched contingency over which she had no control. They who loved each other so well in reality, had parted with less kindness than the merest acquaintances of yesterday.

But a few brief hours ago he was seated by her side, and *now* he was far away upon the sea. So long as he was within her power at Thaneshurst, or so long as there was a chance, even in England, of meeting him at those places where "one meets every one," she had been to a certain extent unconscious of her own mind; but now that he was actually gone, that he had taken a step so decided, so beyond her anticipa-

tion, as to sail for a distant colony by the first ship he could get, and that there was no longer any chance of seeing him at all, she now knew how she loved him—loved him with all the strength of her naturally passionate and impulsive nature; for such hers really was, though habitually concealed by her calm and serene exterior. "Absence lessens moderate passion," says a maximist, "but increases great ones: like the wind, which blows out the taper but kindles fire."

In reality it was in that man's society she had found the greatest pleasure, in that man's attentions the most genuine pride; and yet she had trifled with him as if he had been a very fool. She now felt all the value of the heart she had lost. Perhaps he would write her a bitter and upbraiding letter. Milly sincerely prayed and hoped that he would do so, for then she could reply and explain all; but she hoped in vain.

No letter ever came from Rowland Stanley, and as the dull days crept on—dull amid the strangers who now came to Thaneshurst—she felt bitterly and keenly that the real enjoyments of her life—his love and society—were reft from her. Long, long would he be absent. "It might be for years, and it might be for ever!"

The Hussars had marched for Ireland; Val Reynolds was at Knightsbridge Barracks (not that Milly missed *him*); the guests of Thaneshurst failed to interest her, and so the once gay Milly became very *triste* indeed.

Lectures in the Pavilion or concerts in the Dome, these she now loathed, for the whole place was connected or associated with the night of the Hussar ball, and with Stanley's *last glance* as he turned away and left her alone—for so she felt—oh, so much *alone*, even amid all the military festivity, the whirl of the dances she had to undergo; the blaze of light, the atmosphere loaded with the essences of Rimmel and the breath of exotics came back always to memory, and more than all, that farewell glance of reproach.

She had to endure the dull routine of drives to scenes and places where she had driven or ridden with him, a periodical sermon from weak and meek Mr. Alban Butterley, an hour or two at the skating-rink, a gallop round the racecourse or elsewhere; while he—what would he be doing at that pre-

cise time? How she longed to know! and often surmised, as we have said, whether there were any girls among the passengers to catch his heart as it rebounded from her.

And now how she envied Mabel and Tom Seymour even with their dubious future! That she grieved for Stanley was ere long partially suspected by the family circle at Thaneshurst, so none had the bad taste to talk to her about him but the irrepressible Alf Foxley. Milly was wealthy and an only daughter; and Alf, now that the captain was out of the way, might turn his tender attentions to her. But he had already committed himself with Mabel, as she knew. He rather feared her aristocratic serenity and pride of bearing, and moreover knew instinctively that *he* was not her style of man.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### FOXLEY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

WE have now the troubles of our other pair of lovers to record. Tom Seymour was now sufficiently well and so far recovered that, though Mr. Brooke pressed him to remain and have a shot at the partridges, he felt he was outstaying his visit, and knew intuitively that Mrs. Brooke was most anxious to be quietly rid of him.

With all her love for her mother, Mabel had a positive dread of that good lady; and now that matters had gone so far between herself and Tom, so that the society of each had become necessary for the other's happiness, she in her gentleness and with her love, felt quite unable to stand the taunting lectures she endured in private, and the selfish match-making arguments against a growing tenderness that was more than feared and suspected; and also less was Mabel able to endure the somewhat coarse outbreaks of temper in which her plump parent was apt to indulge, when once her hobby was mounted and in full operation.

The very energy which her mother would exert was terribly antipathetic to her mood of mind now, so there were hours in which she would shun her, in the gardens, in the conservatory, in the grounds or elsewhere—she, the only child

of her parents; and these absences made matters worse, as they were supposed, in many instances correctly enough, to be spent with the interloper, though it was only at rare intervals that the latter might dare to be seen hovering near Mabel, or even bending over her at the piano; and then, how secretly annoyed was Mrs. Brooke when she saw him thus, and how she hated him, and longed to get him out of Thaneshurst! And often, at such times, Mabel would whisper imploringly, "Please, Tom, don't keep near me, dear—mamma's eyes are upon us;" or it might be, "Don't speak just now, Tom darling—Alf is watching you."

The usual "baby-talk" of lovers they had ceased to indulge in, having really serious things to consider and desperate hopes to nourish, too probably in vain. It would have complicated matters sorely for both, and more particularly for poor Mabel, had there been on the *tapis*, as usual in novels and plays, another suitor for her hand, especially one of those high-born lovers that were always hovering in the ambitious mind of Mrs. Brooke, and on some of whom she had her eye, and confidently expected during the next London season to "bring to book" by a little judicious management.

"O Tom," Mabel would say at times, with her eyes full of tears, "I cannot endure much more of this life of tyranny on mamma's part and deceit on mine. She treats me just as if I were a school-girl again, busy with scales, backboard, and Ollendorf!"

And now Mrs. Brooke's worthy "lord and master," who was deemed by her as the chief cause of all this mischief, was likely to have, indeed he certainly *had*, a sad time of it, especially when he was in bed, helpless and without the means of retreat, helpless as a pinned cockchafer, or a fly in the web of a great spider. Again and again she would put on her "considering cap," to think over how this intruder Seymour was to be got rid of decently, as her ideas of politeness were nearly past now.

It is said that even the worm will turn when trod on; and so, with all her gentleness, did Mabel. Her mother's authority and worry that ambitious lady termed and considered maternal love, whereas it was simply domestic tyranny. In vain did Mr. Brooke sometimes venture to urge that Mabel was not a

child now, and that it was useless to treat her as if she was one; that Seymour must soon go back to London now, and then there would be an end of the whole affair. Meanwhile she had an active detective officer in her amiable nephew, whose eyes were seldom removed from the movements of the lovers; and as he discovered that they were in the habit of resorting, no doubt by arrangement, to a certain bower in the garden, to which they went and returned by opposite paths, he lost no time in communicating this fact to Mrs. Brooke, who determined to act accordingly, and with her own ears, from their lips, discover the exact relation in which the two stood to each other.

It was usually after luncheon, when Mr. Brooke was having a doze in his easy-chair, and Mrs. Brooke was engaged with the house-keeper, that this brief meeting took place: and on the day after this information was afforded, in obedience to a glance given her by Foxley, when the party dispersed after luncheon, she assumed her sunshade and garden-hat, and, guided by that worthy, passed quickly out by the conservatory door. He led her by a rather circuitous path concealed among the tall shrubbery to the arbour in question,—a pretty little kiosk of iron and wire, the gilded ornaments of which stood up amid the masses of honeysuckle and jasmine that covered it, and made a cool and shady retreat, though somewhat suggestive of earwigs. At the back of it, and quite unseen, the two inquisitors posted themselves, and they had barely done so when they could perceive between the leaves and trellis-work Mabel and Seymour approaching softly and quickly by opposite paths.

Mrs. Brooke crimsoned with rage, and her eyes were lighted by a dangerous gleam; thus it seemed doubtful to Foxley whether she could command her usually explosive temper sufficiently to overhear the interview. He was quiet enough, though a smile of malice and revenge rippled over all his face as he felt sure that *now* Mr. Thomas Seymour's time was come. Mabel was bare-headed, at least she had only her handkerchief spread over her rich brown hair, and this Tom removed when he took her sweet little face caressingly between his hands and kissed her tenderly. He then led her into the bower, and she seated herself by his side,

with her head drooped on his shoulder, within some six inches or so of her mother's ear.

Tom's face was turned to hers with an expression of great tenderness and love, as she said, with reference to some other conversation : "Have you thought, darling, over all that I said yesterday ?"

"Yes, Mabel ; oh, yes, with the deepest anxiety, yet not deeper than I have endured for long months past," he replied slowly and sadly.

"That our engagement is a hopeless one ?" ("So I should think !" Mrs. Brooke almost hissed out.) "But O Tom, Tom, darling, I shall never, never marry any one but you !"

She who had sat so quietly and chatted so pleasantly at the luncheon table was now convulsed with agitation, tearful, hysterical, and often almost unintelligible. Tom pressed her to his breast, nestling her face as if it had been that of a child in his neck, as he said : "My dear, my loving Mabel, it is terrible to see you afflicted thus !"

"It is because I love you so. I cannot help it, Tom, my mind has been so full, so full——"

"Of what, love ?"

"Of what we spoke about," she sobbed.

"Misgivings about how our engagement is to end ?"

"Yes, Tom, yes."

("*Their* engagement ! engagement again ! Grant me patience, Heaven !" thought Mrs. Brooke, while convulsed with rage, she almost hurt Foxley, so tightly but unconsciously did she clutch that worthy's arm. Mrs. Brooke, hoping against hope, had striven to think that her daughter's regard for Seymour was mere liking for an undeniably handsome and pleasant young man. But now that fancied liking was irrefragably proved to be the wildest and, as she thought it, the maddest love. She had never been in *her* girlhood a quarter so insane about John Brooke—not she !)

"Surely few lovers—except in novels of course—are so afflicted as we are, when loving each other so fondly," moaned Mabel.

("By Jove, aunt, it's as good as a play, this !" whispered Foxley, as he viciously twisted his red moustache.)

Tom only replied to her by a sad smile and caress, for all

that he had to say had been said a thousand times before; so Mabel, after a pause, spoke again: "When parents are unjust and tyrannical, children become of necessity false and rebellious; yes and hypocritical too. O Tom, kiss me, darling; nobody really loves me but you—you and papa. Mamma is so unjust!"

("Ungrateful minx!")

"She watches my letters, as you know; she lectures me without ceasing, and worries me to death by her accusations, advices, and suspicions about you. I shall not be able to endure it much longer," wailed the girl. "But now we must part—the gardener is placing the irons in the lawn, we must join the weary croquet party—and if I am seen with red eyes mamma will be sure to scold me."

And after another mute caress she hurried away, and Tom gazed sadly and lovingly after her, till her skirt disappeared and then turned off in the opposite direction, before Mrs. Brooke, from whose ample and overcharged bosom a deep fierce sigh escaped, could, as she intended to do, get round to the front of the kiosk and meet him face to face.

"What is to be done now, Alf?" she observed. "Matters have come to a pretty pass. They have gone so far that instant action must be taken."

"Just my idea, aunt. Get him out of the house at once; he has loafed here too long already."

"Too long indeed, and this day he shall go. Luckily your stupid uncle, the cause of all this mischief, is in town, and can't interfere with his absurd ideas of propriety, hospitality, friendship for 'old Tom's' son, and so forth. Friendship, forsooth! A pretty use this scurvy fellow has made of it!"

And passing the gathering croquet party, among whom her daughter "the artful gipsy" and Tom "the insolent cad" were standing with an air of as perfect unconcern as if no such scene in the kiosk had occurred, she hastened to her boudoir and opened her desk; while Alf Foxley, very well content with his morning's work, betook himself to the stables, to have a quiet weed with Pupkins the head groom. So all that she had dreaded had now taken to Mrs Brooke a palpable form. She had now something tangible to go on; and to work she went at once, though she paused often and thoughtfully, and viciously bit her pen

Mabel actually loved Seymour! Avowed that love and her engagement to this snake or sneak, this traitor, whom that old idiot John had again and again brought among them in spite of her—Martha Brooke's—teeth! Mabel loved this man Mr. Tom Seymour—Mabel, whom she had pictured as being perhaps the cynosure of all eyes when "presented on her marriage" to Lord A, or Sir B, or (at least) General C—it might be presenting her to the "Onety-oneth" Foot, as wife of that gallant officer; though, sooth to say, this was the most humble and lowly of this good lady's aspirations. And now, *now*, she had cast all the love of her young heart—her young fiddlestick!—upon this nobody, this Tom Seymour indeed! It was too much for human flesh to bear; and she scowled at the offenders, whom she could see on the sunshiny lawn, busy with their croquet mallets. The guilty pair were at that moment a little apart from the rest. Their balls lay close together, and Mabel, with her pretty foot placed on one, was about to send the other spinning; but paused and looked upward at Tom, with a sweet smile doubtless, and what was the arch-fiend saying to her?

Mrs. Brooke could look no more, but turned with a snort to her desk, and concluded her brief epistle. She was not a woman of much delicacy of sentiment or of much mind; so, amid what she deemed her most just anger, the abruptness of her conduct with Seymour did not affect her much. Her note, like the King of Spain's despatch to Spinola, was a model of brevity: "Mrs. Brooke begs to request that, in consequence of what she overheard in the arbour this morning, Mr. Seymour will *terminate his visit to Thaneshurst.* Mr. Brooke is absent, but Mrs. B. presumes that an appeal to her nephew Mr. Foxley is unnecessary."

She rang the bell for Mr. Mulbery, and giving the note, desired him to take it at once to Mr. Seymour on the croquet ground, and then seated herself near a window to watch the effect produced. She saw Mulbery's white head shining in the sunshine as he crossed the beautiful green sward, which was the pride of Diggory Digweed's heart, and present the note on a silver salver to the unsuspecting victim, who drew apart a little, and opened it with an evidently startled air, which became one of manifest discomposure as he thrust it

into his pocket. Then she saw him readjust his necktie once or twice, as if he had a choking sensation, and lift his hat as if he wanted air; but not an atom of compunction did she feel for the awkwardness of his position, or the painful affront and humiliation that were put upon him.

With great coolness, however, he continued to play the game to its close, though frequent bursts of laughter from the two Miss Conyers and others, as they playfully shook their mallets at him, evinced how wild and eccentric poor Tom's playing had suddenly become. The moment he could do so unnoticed he retired to his room to re-peruse the note, every hateful word of which seemed to be burned into his brain. He had long expected such a catastrophe or finale, but scarcely in a fashion like this—so abrupt and rude in bearing that he shrank from mortifying Mabel and wounding her delicate sensibility by showing her such a note, and ignorant that Mrs. Brooke had kept a copy of it, for, with all her rage, she was methodical in her procedure.

"In consequence of what she *overheard* in the arbour," the note ran. They had been subjected to espionage and watched. Now she knew all—and all was over between him and Mabel for ever. He sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"To lose her, to lose her!" he moaned, and absolutely rocked himself to and fro, while his heart was wrung with an agony of thought, that felt like bodily pain. He thus sat for some time like one in a state of stupefaction, as if a wall of adamant had suddenly risen up between him and every object in life—between him and the world. Anon he was seized by a wild desire for motion, for exhilaration; a desire for something like railway speed, noise, racket, bustle, oblivion. He started to his feet, and then seated himself again to think. He could have no farewell interview with Mabel, and he dared not write to her; and doubtless Foxley, who was in sympathy with Mrs. Brooke, and knew all her secrets, would exultingly inform Mabel how and why the visit came to a termination so abrupt.

There was some relief, however, in action and motion. He packed his portmanteaus, strapped his rugs, and so forth with a numbed, blind, and desperate emotion in his mind, with

more sorrow at the whole situation than anger for the affront; then deliberately rang the bell for Mr. Mulbery, to whom he said, with an air of as much composure as he could assume, while placing a few sovereigns in his hand, "For yourself and the servants. I am suddenly summoned to town."

"No bad news, I hope, sir?"

"Oh, not at all—government duty only. Will you kindly have my things sent in the first place to the principal hotel in Lewes? And now good-bye."

"Good-bye, sir, and a pleasant journey to you," added the rather mystified butler.

"Thanks," replied Seymour, as he took his hat and cane, carefully buttoned his gloves; and little could any one have conceived the volcano that raged in his breast, as he quietly walked forth from Thaneshurst by the conservatory door, his whole desire being to get away unseen. Thence, by a path he knew through the coppice, he reached the highway, and took with a heavy, heavy heart the road to Lewes.

It was not until dinner-time that the absence of Seymour was observed, and for the first time Mabel saw that no cover was set for him at the table. His absence therefore was anticipated, known to her mamma. She glanced timidly and inquiringly at that self-possessed lady, who mentioned, as if casually, to her guests in general that she was "*so* sorry, but their pleasant friend Mr. Seymour had to leave for London, in consequence of a sudden telegram, she believed."

In the sweet sad face of Mabel, Milly could at once detect an indescribable expression of vacant consternation, and their eyes met sympathetically. Tom gone! Mabel was bewildered; but an explanatory note must be left for her somewhere or with some one, she felt sure.

"The captain went off in this fashion, like a rocket," said Foxley, laughing; "now his friend Seymour has vanished too. I wonder who the next will be?"

They little could conceive *who* the next would be.

Somehow the dinner-party was not a lively one on this particular day. Mrs. Brooke was abstracted; Mabel was silent; even the usually gushing and prattling Fanny Conyers was repressed; and Milly Allingham was *distraite*, for, as Stanley's favourite friend, she missed Tom. Another link

between her and the absent one was gone with him ; and so she who once seemed to bloom and expand amid the homage of men and the excitement of a ballroom was as a closed flower now. Compunction and sorrow were certainly new sensations to our charming coquette, and she did not like them : so she, we say, whose silly *rôle* had ever been to dazzle and fascinate any unfortunate fellow who danced with, or sat next her, was silent now ; even the Reverend Alban Butterley was not worth powder and shot. Something had surely happened ; yet the irrepressible Foxley was unusually gay. He had, he thought, turned a trump card that morning.

They were to have played Badminton on the lawn before dinner—Mabel and Tom. Digweed had set up the poles and the netting, and she thought it *so* unaccountable that Tom did not appear ; but that was explained now. However, when Mrs. Brooke retired, as she often did after dinner, into that pretty boudoir already described, Mabel, with a heart that beat fast and painfully, followed her.

"Mamma," said she, "there is some mystery in all this."

"In all what?" asked the old lady sharply.

"The disappearance of Mr. Seymour."

"How so?"

"No telegram has come here to-day."

"Indeed! You have been inquiring?"

"Yes, mamma."

"How interested you are in his movements!"

"Surely, surely, dearest mamma, in your—your suspicions concerning me you have not affronted T—Mr. Seymour?" urged Mabel tearfully.

"How dare you speak to me on the subject, Miss Brooke?" demanded her mother, imperiously turning fully round upon her, with features inflamed by anger. "I know *all* now. You have deceived me, and he too has deceived me ; I was prepared for that. But I shall punish you both for it yet, if I can."

"Mamma!" urged Mabel, trying to caress her ; but Mrs. Brooke's large white hands thrust the weeping girl back.

"O mamma," she wailed, "do not treat me so harshly! I cannot help loving Tom—"

"Tom!"

"Yes, though you think him poor; yes, loving him, even as you loved dear papa when he was poor. You always tell me that I am rich; if so, then I shall surely have enough for two. Oh, how sad my heart is, how pained it is to vex you! Darling mamma, kiss me."

But Mrs. Brooke averted her fat face, and thrust her daughter from her again.

"Am I to understand, mamma, that you have affronted Mr. Seymour?"

"Such men as he are not easily affronted."

"Sent him away, then?"

"Yes."

"Bid him leave Thaneshurst?"

"And high time too, after that interview in the arbour this morning. Miss Brooke, I forbid you to approach this subject again. He left Thaneshurst in consequence of a note I sent him."

"Note?" faltered Mabel.

"Yes; a note, of which this is a copy."

"O mamma," said Mabel, as she turned away weeping, how could you—how *could* you!"

She retired in grief and confusion to her own room, striving to recall all that had passed between her and Tom at that interview in the harbour, when her mamma must have played the part of eavesdropper: and from that hour Mrs. Brooke's ambition and worldly scheming seemed to take the form of tyranny; and Mabel, as will be seen in the sequel, was not strong-minded enough to endure or to face it. The strain was too much for a girl so gentle by nature, and ere long it began to tell upon her manner and appearance. Her charming face became pinched in expression, and there were dark circles of bistre hue round her weary eyes, all the more weary that they had to smile when her heart was sad, sad indeed. Often she wept upon the bosom of Milly, and murmured, "This separation will break my heart. Oh, why was I ever born? Would that I were dead; indeed, indeed, dear Milly, I would that I were so!"

When Mr. Brooke was told on his return to Thaneshurst of all that had transpired in his absence, though far from inclined to encourage such a suitor as Seymour, he felt sorry

for Mabel, and somewhat shocked by the whole affair! yet when Mrs. Brooke vituperated and reviled Seymour bitterly he could not help saying,

"Don't be so hard on him, Martha dear; the lad is a good lad, and who could help loving such a girl as our Mabel? The son of my old friend Tom, I told his father that I would look after his future; old Tom died all the easier for the promise. And to have the lad turned out of the house in this way! O Martha—"

"Oh, fiddle-de-*dee!*"

And she flounced away from him in a fit of ungovernable fury.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### AN UNEXPECTED PROGRAMME.

"THE lovesick," says Dutton Cook, "must not with too great abruptness be cut off from love, or all dwelling upon love; patients must be humoured to the top of their bent—indulged at all costs." So Mabel and Milly found each in the other a species of safety-valve amid their mutual sorrow, for each girl had no secrets from the other; so one could talk perpetually of Stanley and the other of Seymour. But the latter had none with whom to commune; thus his heart was full to overflowing with anger and bitterness.

Expelled from Thaneshurst! This was his ever-corroding idea. Separated hopelessly from Mabel, after all that had passed between them; and now, when her love and her society had become necessary for his happiness, his very existence as it were, their paths in life must lie wide apart for ever. She must be given up now—given up! He must avoid her—seek her pathways and her presence no more. Never again should he gaze into the tender violet eyes, that looked with love to his; never again hear her sweetly-modulated voice, telling him that she loved him for his love of her; and never again should a touch of her pretty hand send a thrill of rapture to his heart; for all thought of her must be given up!

Yet he could not, for the life of him, quite abandon the vicinity of Thaneshurst and of her; thus, instead of going back to the dull boarding-house near Harley Street, he took

up his temporary residence in Lewes. In consequence of his "accident when riding," his leave of absence had been lengthened by the comptroller; so to London Tom resolved that he should not return till the last moment. He would linger near the abode of his idol, near the Eden from which he had been banished. Linger—but for what object, or to what end? Tom could scarcely say, unless it were the desperate chance of seeing her once again alone. Objectlessly, apparently, he wandered up and down the steep and empty streets of Lewes, by the Ouse, by the racecourse, by the Castle ruins, for several days, with the vague hope, the keen longing and desire to see her again, even if not alone; one glimpse of her would have been some food for his craving. After all his sweet daily, yea, hourly intercourse with Mabel, how horribly slow seemed this morning about such a place as Lewes, alone, and when almost within musket-shot of her! It was intolerable!

Could he but meet her once again, were it but for five minutes, to exchange promises once more, perhaps to discuss their plans—but what plans had they? what future? Yet they could not *end* thus; it was impossible; they were too dear to each other. But day followed day in dull, grim, and uniform monotony, and Tom had nothing to do but dream over past joys—the hours that were no more—and think, think, oh, so miserably, about their mutual sorrow and perplexity.

Thoughts and fears of *her* agitation distressed and disturbed him; the chances of her too-probable illness alarmed him; and in either case he could neither soothe, see, nor hear of her. In the past time, a year or so ago now, when the chances of his love being successful were dubious—and later, when he felt sure that the heart of Mabel was his own—how often had they ridden or driven or rambled by those spots where he now wandered so miserably alone! How many places had they sketched together, sitting side by side—the ruins of old St. Pancras among the fields, the bridge over the Ouse, the ivied ruins of William de Warren's Castle, and so forth—or wandered in the lanes hand-in-hand, often silent, but absorbed in happy thoughts and in each other!

*Now*, how it made his heart ache to be alone in those

spots, where every tree and blade of grass seemed to summon up the vanished past!

As to what Mr. Alfred Foxley, or what the pleasant circle he had left so suddenly, might think of his abrupt departure he cared not a jot, unless some of them saw him in the vicinity of Thaneshurst, as the telegraph and railway cover many such sudden and strange movements in these days. He was not without a shrewd suspicion that his avowed rival Foxley might have had some hand in the whole affair; but even that he cared little for; his whole soul was absorbed by thoughts of Mabel—her wonder, surprise, and sorrow that he should have left her without some explanation, or that letter which he knew but too well by past experience it would be useless to write, as the key of the household despatch-box was never in Mabel's keeping.

At last he resolved to put his thoughts on paper, and contrive some means of getting a letter conveyed to her. Could he but meet Mrs. Plum—pretty Polly Plum—her own attendant, she might, like the true waiting-maid of the old romances and plays, sympathise with them both. How many expeditions there are in this world on which we set forth, and voyages for which we spread our canvas, all unconsciously to ourselves, and of which we cannot foresee the end! And so it was with our pilgrim of love this evening. Little could Tom foresee all the events that were to *hinge* on the writing of that letter, in which he told her all that she already knew from her mother's lips of the harsh manner in which he had been required to curtail his visit; and then he filled up two entire pages with some rather incoherent assurances of his own unalterable love, &c., &c., and so forth. And having sealed it up, for he did not trust in the security of a gummed envelope, as the evening was closing in, he ventured through an opening in a hedge into the grounds of Thaneshurst; and with a heart that beat not with apprehension, but with eager hope, he drew near the well-known house, in the windows of which lights were already beginning to shine as dusk was falling.

In which of all those rooms was she at that moment? The drawing-room, most probably; for this was about the time when Mrs. Brooke, like a line-of-battle ship heading the smaller fry of a convoy, usually sailed thither at the head of

her female guests. None of the servants seemed abroad. In the gardens, the stable-court, all was silent; and with his anxiety to have his letter delivered, Tom was not without an honest sense of shame and unmerited humiliation to find himself prowling, like one under sentence of outlawry, or one about to commit a crime, near the stately mansion in which he had been so long the welcome guest of its owner.

It was an intolerable conviction; and he felt his cheek burn with indignation at the thought of what might happen if he came unexpectedly on Alfred Foxley. And already in imagination he heard the sneers, the taunts, it might be the insulting threats in which that unamiable personage was quite capable of indulging, and which, situated as Seymour was, he could scarcely punish or repel. He passed round the conservatory, wherein for many an hour, unknown to all but themselves, he had lingered with her, in the hope of seeing perhaps old Digweed busy among his plants, and that by the temptation of a sovereign he might be induced to play the part of Love's postman; but the conservatory was dark, and Tom Seymour turned away in despair.

He was already leaving the place when, in the midst of all these thoughts, he heard his name pronounced by a voice whose tones arrested the beating of his heart; and turning, he found himself face to face with—Mabel. She was standing at the conservatory door, the same door by which he had quitted Thaneshurst as he thought for ever. His agitation, and hers too, was great, and under all the circumstances naturally so.

"Tom—Tom!"

"Mabel! Mab—Queen Mab—my little queen!"

In a moment his arms were around her, and she was sobbing almost hysterically on his breast, while half fatuously he murmured her pet names in her ear, and his soul seemed in his eyes as he gazed into hers.

"O joy, Mabel—unlooked-for joy of joys!" said Seymour, in a tender but broken voice. "I have a letter for you—here it is; take it and go, my darling, ere we are discovered again."

"Of that there is no fear just now, Tom. I am in the house alone," replied Mabel, as he kissed away her tears.

"Alone?"

"Yes; mamma and all of them have driven to Brighton to hear Mr. Butterley lecture on something. I had a headache; and as you were no longer here, she excused me," added Mabel, placing his letter in her bosom, to be perused when he was gone.

"Oh, how fortunate all this is!" exclaimed Tom, as she quickly procured a shawl, and threw it over her head. She then took his arm; and placing her hand in his, they turned away by silent yet tacit consent through the well-known garden walks, all aglow with roses now dew laden, towards the arbour or kiosk where last they had sat together; that creeper-clad bower, over which the delicate acacias were quivering in the starlight, where they had often exchanged those marks of mutual esteem not meant for the public eye.

To rehearse all the broken phrases of tenderness and all the "baby-talk" in which they indulged would somewhat tire the reader by its iteration and *re*iteration; but after a time they became more sensible and serious. Fate and fortune, life and death often hang or hinge (to use a parliamentary phrase) on trifles, on chance or coincidence; and so it was in this instance. Most unexpectedly had Tom and Mabel met.

And by this meeting all their future was changed.

Too well did both know now and feel the utter hopelessness of any consent being given to their union; so what were they to do? Part for ever? Oh, no, no; reclining as they were in each other's arms, cheek to cheek and hand clasped in hand, amid the starlit solitude of the arbour, that could not be thought of for a moment. And as she so reclined in his arms, he became sensible of that which has been described as "a certain subtle essence, which may or may not be the result of scents or essences, but seems indigenous to all taking women." Her rich brown hair, her muslin dress, her laces, and her shawl were all pervaded by this; and the insupportable craving to be with her once again was gratified now.

Poor Mabel was very agitated and hysterical as she thought of that terrible day when he lay after his fall, to all appearance dead, with his head in her lap, and when she be*li*eved that "the great sunderer of human hearts, Death," had parted

them for ever; and how, in her wild grief, the great secret of her heart escaped her and revived *him.*

Long and earnest was the conference between the pair as to their future plans; present *hope* they had none. Their meeting seemed the guidance of Fate; there was a strange harmony in the way things were going with them. Heaven did indeed mean them for each other, and kind Heaven would doubtless bring all nicely round in the end; but in the mean time, they would have to act for themselves, and take time by the forelock.

"It is a dreadful thing to disobey one's parents as I am doing, Tom," sobbed Mabel: "I even seem to see before me what the Bible says."

"But, Mab love, the Bible does not refer to harsh, to selfish, or ungenerous parents."

"O Tom, dear papa is none of them."

"Of course not; but—but—"

"He is thoroughly ruled by mamma, you would say?"

"Yes; consent, then, that I may save you from others and for myself. Speak, dearest Mabel. Never may we have such a chance as this again."

His voice trembled with emotion as he spoke; and, indeed, his whole frame did so too.

"I fear, Tom, that—that—"

"What, Mabel?"

"I must be terribly wicked to listen to you."

"If so, it is at my suggestion," he urged, caressing her tenderly. "As my wife, Mabel, you will perhaps be estranged for a time from some of your friends."

"But I shall have *your* love," she replied, in a voice of enchanting tenderness; "and though mamma never may be appeased, poor papa doubtless will in time, when all is irrevocably over, and they see alike the futility of resistance or resentment."

"My own thoughts exactly, darling."

Tom was, as he well might be, dazzled, flattered, and bewildered by the depth of this girl's love for him; her, perhaps, absurd self-sacrifice and self-abnegation—and for him, all for him! How deep her love must be! If she married Tom Seymour, the girl, even amid all the calm deep ardour of her

affection for him, thought more of what her easy-going father might think of her rashness and disobedience than her hard, scheming, and undisguisedly ambitious mother, of whose wrath she had a genuine fear. But the wrath would surely pass away when that was done which could not be undone, and when, for weal or woe, sunshine or gloom, till death did them part, she was the wife of Tom Seymour.

"O Tom dearest, this is all so strange!" said Mabel, as they slowly proceeded through the garden towards the door of the conservatory. "*What* will people say of us?"

"That we have loved each other—nay, *do* love each other—very dearly. There are bounds even to the control of parents over their children in the choice of partners for life. O Mabel, to think of spending life with you! I, no doubt, shall be hardly spoken about as the thief who stole a rich man's daughter. But, darling, don't weep so; we shall not be the first who have wedded in haste, and we shall not be the last; and be assured that none can be happier than we."

And, remembering the affront put upon him by the blunt manner of his expulsion from Thaneshurst, something of triumph mingled with the delight that thrilled through Seymour's heart. So Mrs. Brooke's rough policy was bringing about the very conclusion she had so deprecated, reviled, and ridiculed; the idea of *her* daughter's marriage with a penniless adventurer, for so she termed and deemed Tom Seymour!

Of course we cannot excuse the programme these young people intended to carry out, which was nothing less than to elope! But it must be borne in mind that both were young and very, very much in love indeed; that both, after the Rubicon should be passed, relied greatly, too much perhaps, on Mr. Brooke's influence and forgiveness, as he had a passionate love for Mabel and a sincere regard for Tom; so, in plain English, they came to the desperate resolution of running off together.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### WHAT THE SUPERCARGO TOLD.

FROM its monotony as day succeeds day, there are perhaps fewer places than a ship voyaging fitted for the cure of an

ailment like Stanley's ; but to him, of all the twenty-four hours, the most obnoxious time was that which has been called "the unholy four o'clock waking" A.M., when everything we have done that is foolish, or encountered that is sad —debts, duns, jiltings, and all manner of mundane misery—crowds so visibly upon us ; yet the day comes in, and "come what come may," perforce we pass it like yesterday. So it was with Milly elsewhere, in her luxurious chamber at Thaneshurst ; but Stanley could little believe that they each awoke, and filled by thoughts of each other, at the same time.

Milly felt sorrow pure and simple ; but Stanley felt himself aggrieved and mocked, where the mockery and aggrieving were irreparable ; and yet times there were—so inconsistent are lovers and the loving—that he recalled softly and tenderly looks, and tones, and pressures of the hand, which seemed much at variance with the episode of that night at Brighton ; but "thinking over one's wounds only makes them smart the sorer."

Never more could come to them again all that Byron describes as

> "The gentle pressure, and the thrilling touch,
> The least glance better understood than words,
> Which still said all, and ne'er could say too much ;
> A language, too, but like to that of birds,
> Known but to them, at least appearing such
> As but to lovers a true sense affords :
> Sweet playful phrases, which would seem absurd
> To those who have ceased to hear such, or ne'er heard."

And so his mind ran much on such memories, while the time sped on, in the clear sunny days when the deep green of the waves was flecked by the snow-white froth on their crests, and the *Queen* rolled buoyantly before the wind, with all her tacks on board ; when the blue of the cloudless sky was wondrously transparent, and there was nothing to disturb the surface of the sea but perhaps a shoal of fish glittering in the bright sun, or Mother Carey's chickens tripping around the ship—little brown sparrow-like birds, which some of the crew assured him were the spirits of drowned seamen. But most of all did his sad thoughts come to him in the calm and lovely nights, by when stars thousands were sparkling in the sky—stars never seen by him before, many of them being so great

and brilliant as to throw long lines of white light on the blue dancing water.

To him the voyage promised to be one of intense monotony, varied only by a passing sail, or the smoke of a distant steamer rising to a prodigious height in the ambient air. And then there were the Sundays, when all the crew appeared in clean shirts; when the Union Jack was spread over the companion-hatch, or folded across the capstan beneath the Bible and Prayer-book; the hands mustered aft and all standing reverently bareheaded, to hear Captain Tom Parker—the true impersonation of a British seaman—or it might be Stanley himself, read those prayers prescribed by the Church of England "to be read at sea."

And one day there was a great event, for when Stanley came on deck the ship had several flags displayed, though at sea.

"Why is this, Captain?" said he.

"A woman in the fore-cabin has been brought *to hammock* aboard, and the little one must be christened after the ship, by me."

Then came head-winds compelling the *Queen* to make long tacks eastward and westward—winds which made the hands forward gloomy, and the captain aft cross, as he averred it was the result of Melville, the Scotch supercargo, having shot wantonly some of Mother Carey's chickens; and though Stanley's heart had been plundered of "these first joys that come not back again," no one would have thought so who saw him merrily tossing off his wine on Saturday night, when the usual toast of "Sweethearts and wives!" went round, and when songs were sung and stories told to while away the time. And many a strange wild story of the West Indies and the Gulf of Florida, of buccaneers and sunken galleons, of treasure guarded by spirits, and many a quaint or wild yarn of the deep, were told as the listeners drew each other on; and on the second Saturday night they had been at sea, while head-winds were still baffling them, Melville, the supercargo, a sharp-witted, intelligent, and well-educated man, about forty years of age, with a thick curling brown beard and clear bright dark-gray eyes, volunteered to relate a somewhat startling love story, of

which he became cognisant when residing in one of the French West-India Islands, following suit after Stanley had told his Bhotan story of "little Wickets," the dying sub-lieutenant, with the strange addition of how unconsciously he had related it to his own sister, Fanny Conyers.

And strange to say, in some of its points or features the story of Melville, the Scotch supercargo, brought rather remote times, as by a spell, together, seeming to annihilate intermediate space by some of its minor details.

"Though a Scotsman by blood and race, as my name imports, I am, singular to say, almost a native of Guadaloupe, my father having been an officer in one of the Scottish regiments stationed there at the restoration of the island to France, and who settled there as a planter. He left the most of his property to my elder brother Jack, while I had to push my way in the world at a desk in the office of Pierre Duhamel, a merchant of Pointe-à-Pitre, the great commercial emporium of that island, which is unquestionably the largest and most valuable of all the Caribbees.

"I have a great love of Guadaloupe, which was so long my home, and yet see in fancy all its lovely fertility, the azure sky that backs its lofty hills, La Soufrière, or the sulphur mountain, crowned by black smoke, the deep blue ocean breaking in snowy foam on the ruddy coral rocks of Basse-terre, the smiling verdure of its fertile valleys, and the dense dark mangroves that almost shroud La Rivière Salée. Though a strong affection existed between my brother Jack and me, we were very different in character, taste, and even appearance. He was tall and lithe, handsome and bold in bearing, with a kind of eagle eye, and a face that could by turns be very haughty or very winning and attractive in expression. An overseer managed the estate and the slaves which were thereon until 1848, and Jack spent most of his time with his gun among the ridge of mountains which divide the island into Basse-terre and Capes-terre, or in his boat fishing amid the watery solitude of the Grand Cul de Sac, for he was a keen sportsman, and much given to solitary meditations; and thus sometimes he would sit for hours, cigar in mouth, on the coral rocks that overhung the sea, watching its billows breaking at his feet, lost in day-dreams.

"But after a time it came to pass that Jack fell in love, and the object of this love was Otillie de Bassompierre, the only daughter of M. Maurice Bénigne de Bassompierre, an old French planter, a man of great wealth and pride of birth, as he boasted himself the lineal descendant of the great marshal of that name who was ambassador to Charles I. Otillie, then in the first flush of womanhood, was like a painter's dream or the heroine of a romance. She was indeed a very lovely girl, with a graceful but commanding figure, a broad yet low forehead, over which her thick dark hair was parted in a kind of peak, somewhat straight black eyebrows, and eyes of the same hue, that all contrasted strangely and strongly with the creamy whiteness of her complexion. Her charms of manner were altogether her own, tender, lively, and alluring; so when Jack fell in love with her, his passion increased till it became a part of his inner life—his very existence.

"'When we first spoke, Bob,' said he to me, 'our eyes met, and the secret of my heart was laid bare. Where *had* I seen those eyes before? In my day-dreams, I suppose, for somehow their soft expression seemed familiar to me.'

"Mademoiselle de Bassompierre was not insensible to Jack's great regard for her, and their love soon became mutual, for it is an element that ripens fast in the sultry tropics; but her father was averse to any nearer tie than mere friendship, not because Jack's wealth was far inferior to his own, but on the score of difference of race and, more than all, the difference of religion; for Jack, though calling himself a Protestant, was not perhaps exactly sure of what he was, and the Bassompierres were Catholics of the most rigid kind, and with reference to Jack were greatly influenced by M. le Curé Hilarion of Ste. Marie de Guadaloupe, a very ascetic French priest of the old school, and religion, like politics, runs far higher in all colonies than in the mother country. Well aware of the mutual love of the young people by common report and by his own suspicion, M. Bassompierre had yet no actual proof of it; and to prevent matters going too far would gladly have avoided altogether the acquaintance or friendship of Jack, but that their interests were somewhat bound up together in the buying and selling of sugars, cottons, cocoa, rum, flour, olive-oil, and so forth.

"He often surprised them together at the piano, singing duets to which the secret of their hearts lent a meaning and a pathos known to themselves alone; and their pulses would quicken and their bosoms thrill when hand might touch hand unseen, while wandering over the keys as the soft evening of the tropical climate deepened around them, and no light was there but the stars of heaven and the flames, perhaps, from the giant peak of La Soufrière. The 'Chansons' of Béranger were their favourite, and to Jack Melville, as a Scotsman, Otillie was never weary of singing the 'Adieux de Marie Stuart,' and certainly he was never weary of listening.

"Between two such natures as those of Otillie and my brother much of this sort of thing could not continue without a crisis; and on one of those voluptuous evenings, when they deemed no living thing was near them, save the red fireflies flashing among the flowers without, her head fell on Jack's shoulder, his arm went round, and they sat long in a happy trance, from which they were rather roughly awakened by the sudden entrance of M. Bassompierre, M. Duhamel, and the servants with wax lights.

"The thin stern countenance of the old Frenchman, with its acute facial angle *à la* that of the Grand Monarque, as he took in the whole situation at once, became inflamed with sudden passion, and the moment his domestics withdrew he struck his cane on the floor, and said: 'This somewhat surpasses my expectations. Retire to your room instantly, Mdlle. de Bassompierre; and you, monsieur, shall I have the honour to order your horse?'

"'If you please, monsieur; but permit me to urge,' stammered my brother, full of annoyance, grief, and perplexity, 'permit me to explain——'

"'*Retirez-vous!* Away, M. Melville! We can have no more of this—you have presumed too far.'

"'Presumed?'

"'I say so, monsieur,' continued the old Frenchman, preserving an unruffled kind of bearing, combining, most singularly, defiance, ease, and suavity, notwithstanding the cutting insolence of his words. 'Your attentions to mademoiselle my daughter have exceeded alike the bounds of politeness and friendship. We have the honour to wish you *bon-jour*.'

"And taking by the hand his pale and trembling daughter, he led her out of the room, accompanied by old Pierre Duhamel, on whose face there was such a grin that, but for his white hair, Jack—as he told me next day—was about to knock him down. So, after love mutually developed, avowed, and accepted, thus more strongly riveting the link that bound their existence together, these two were roughly parted. Jack's fiery spirit rebelled at the whole affair; but he bore the insult meekly because it had been given by her father, and consoled himself by conviction that her heart was his; and that as M. de Bassompierre was old and ailing, and could not last for ever, a time would come when Otillie would be the arbitress of her own destiny, despite even the curé of Ste. Marie. But now, though none save I was cognisant of the breach, there gradually spread through the isle a rumour that she was to be wedded by old Pierre Duhamel.

"It is impossible to describe what were the emotions of my brother on this rumour reaching him; and aware how matrimonial matters are conducted by the French, such an outrage seemed probable enough. He felt neither wounded pride, nor disappointed love, nor even jealousy, but only pity and fear. He wrote her four painfully-worded and earnest letters, beseeching her to abandon home and all, and trust to him alone. To these he received no answer, for, as the event proved, they never reached her to whom they were addressed, but fell into the hands of Duhamel, who eventually made a sad and wicked use of them.

"One evening soon after this story went abroad, Jack, who had been out shooting, found himself wandering near the house of his beloved. It was a handsome villa, built of wood principally, with pillars of brick, all painted white, with green balconies and verandahs in front, and around it were luxuriant silk-cotton trees, under the stately branches of which he and Bassompierre had transacted many a bargain and drunk many a flask of iced champagne. Jack drew very near the well-known windows of the drawing-room, in which the lights were shining, and he knew that *she* would surely be there. The sun had long since sunk into the sea, the shadows around the villa were dark and opaque, the fireflies were stirring among the cotton-trees, a cool breeze came

from La Rivière Salée, and the pure silvery moon of the Caribbean sky was gilding the distant peaks that overlook Basse-terre.

"'What an hour this would be if spent with *her!*' thought Jack, with a sigh, as he leant on his double-barrelled rifle, full of sad thoughts.

"Suddenly he heard the tinkling of the piano-keys, and concealing himself in the shady verandah, could see through the open window old M. Bassompierre asleep in his cane easy-chair, and Otillie seated at the piano, her glorious dark hair for coolness all unbound and floating over her white-muslin dress; and all unwitting that she had any audience, she made Jack's heart thrill with sorrow and rapture as she sang the song they both loved so well from Béranger—'Mary's Farewell.'

"'Adieu, charmant pays de France,
Que je dois tant chérir;
Berceau de mon heureuse enfance,
Adieu; te quitter c'est mourir!
Charmant pays de France,
Berceau de mon enfance,
Adieu; te quitter c'est mourir—
Te quitter c'est mourir—te quitter c'est mourir—
Te quitter c'est mourir!'

"As she sang this sweet and plaintive song, Jack became suddenly startled by the apparition of a couple of gigantic negroes, naked, all save their cotton breeches of red and white stripes, who appeared at the back of the old gentleman's chair, as if they had sprung up by magic or through the floor. Each had a glittering knife in his right hand; their bodies were shining with cocoa-nut oil, showing that they were bent on murder and outrage, with the ultimate hope of escape; and their dusky eyeballs gleamed as they looked stealthily and leeringly around them, and more than once at Otillie.

"Quickly and silently Jack capped his rifle, and brought it to his shoulder; already the knives were uplifted; another second, and it would have been all over with poor old Bassompierre, when bang-bang went both rifle-barrels; there was a shriek from Otillie; and when the smoke cleared away Jack saw the intended victim standing erect, with a very

paralysed expression of face, and the two Angola ruffians on the floor wallowing in their blood, each with a good charge of Number 6 planted so well in or about the region of the heart, that in a short time they both breathed their last.

"Otillie seemed about to faint, and still more so when Jack leaped in by the window and threw his arms around her; and a striking tableau they formed when the whole domestics of the establishment—white, brown, and black—startled by the shots, came crowding into the drawing-room, and by them the dead men were recognised as two of the worst and most evil-disposed negroes in the whole plantation, from which they had been that same morning summarily dismissed by M. de Bassompierre.

"'A great deal may be done in ten minutes,' as Jack said to me afterwards; 'but, by Jove, Bob, I never did so much in ten seconds in my life before—polishing off thus a couple of rascals, saving the lives of Otillie and her father, and winning his forgiveness and regard; but my blood ran cold,' he added, 'when I thought of what *might* have been had not some strange charm led my steps that way at the time. It was indeed the finger of Fate that directed me.'

"I rather thought it was his love for the dark-eyed Otillie; but poor Jack had that which Wilkie Collins calls 'a good deal of the mystic and the dreamer in his composition; and science and logic are but broken reeds to depend upon with men of that kind.'

"'Forgive me the past, M. Melville, and give me your hand, said the old gentleman in a broken voice, after all had been explained in another apartment. He was deeply moved by the whole affair, and his emotions nearly choked him. So Jack was now installed at the Villa de Bassompierre, in greater favour than ever, *vice* old Duhamel cashiered—at least he did not venture there; and as I had the misfortune to be in his counting-house, a devil of a life the old wasp led me; but I was as neccssary to him as his salary was to me, and as he could find none else there to do my work, we were for a time perforce compelled to endure each other's society.

"Once more united, how happily passed the time of the lovers! All was settled for their marriage, even the day was fixed; and Hilarion the curé had no opposition to offer, or

believed it would be futile now. The trousseau of the bride was prepared by the most fashionable modiste in Pointe-à-Pitre; and my brother made all those additions to and alterations in his house that were deemed necessary for her reception there. On the morning before their marriage-day Jack and Otillie were together alone in the drawing-room of the villa. Both were very silent—he with his heart too full of happiness to speak much, and indeed all that successful lovers are in the habit of saying had been already said over and over again—but the silence of Otillie was caused, strange to say, by some sudden, and, to her, most unaccountable foreboding of evil to come; though with her head reclined on his shoulder she sat close by his side, with her soft dark eyes bent dreamily on the lovely scenery, the long avenues of lofty palms, the cocoa-nuts tossing in the sea-breeze, the far extent of fields covered with the coffee plant, and the corn-fields in all their bloom, a sea of pale lilac flowers, under the glory of the sinking Caribbean sun.

"'Forgive me, love,' said Jack: 'but why are you silent? Think of to-morrow, Otillie!'

"'My heart is full of it. And will you always love me as you do now?' she asked, with a fond smile.

"'Always. O Otillie, to be with you is to adore you. After to-morrow we shall never be separate till—till——'

"'When?' said she anxiously.

"'The hand of God parts us.'

"'To-morrow has not yet come!' said the voice of M. Bassompierre, who had approached them unheard; 'and ere it does come, I must have a word or two with you alone. Follow me, Monsieur Melville.'

"Startled by the extreme gravity—even severity—of the old man's manner, my brother followed him into another apartment, the door of which he closed, as if about to enter into some matter of business; but suddenly he threw it open, and while his face grew pale with rage, and his eyes shot fire, he quickly said, 'Monsieur, your horse is at the door. Begone, reprobate! from what I know now, my daughter can never be your wife!'

"'What madness is this, monsieur?' asked Jack, thinking the other had lost his senses.

"'No madness at all: I say what I mean,' replied Bassompierre, in a voice that quivered with passion. 'Coward, though my hand is old and tremulous, it can hold a pistol yet!'

"'By heavens, no man on earth but you could have used language like this to me with impunity,' said Jack, roused in turn.

"'Go, wretch—go, I say, and at the office of M. Duhamel, in the city, you will learn all!'

"Impressed and bewildered by this, but without being permitted to see his betrothed, Jack left the villa in great perturbation of spirit, and galloped like a madman towards Pointe-à-Pitre."

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### SEQUEL TO THE SUPERCARGO'S STORY.

"IT was now my business to give Jack a clue to the sudden rage of Bassompierre. A mulatto girl had been found drowned in the harbour, just beneath the windows of our office, into the vestibule of which the body was brought until it could be removed by the police, who, in the bosom of her dress, found four letters signed by my brother Jack—four letters expressive of the most passionate love—the four letters he had written to Otillie, and which she had never received, but from which the addresses with *her* name were carefully removed; hence they were supposed by the authorities and all who were interested therein, to have been written by Jack to the drowned girl, even while the arrangements for his marriage with Mademoiselle de Bassompierre were in progress. That old Duhamel had placed these letters where they were so adroitly found, I had not a shadow of doubt, as I had a distinct recollection of seeing him hovering near the drowned girl, and read a singular expression in his venomous eyes. They were of a hideous green hazel, and they looked brighter and greener than ever as he passed through the counting-house, rubbing over each other, with unconcealed satisfaction, his hideous yellow hands, the nails of which were always scraped and trimmed like spikes, or the talons of a hawk.

"It was in vain that Jack, in accents of passion and indigna-

tion, urged that the letters were written by him to Otillie, though she had never received them, how or why he had no means of ascertaining; in vain he declared that he knew nothing of the drowned girl; and it was also in vain that MM. Bassompierre and Duhamel urged upon Otillie that she had been grossly deceived, disgraced, and injured by the anthor of those letters, and the trick he had resorted to of pretending they had been intended for herself.

"She did not believe them. The letters were retained by the magistrates; thus she never saw them, though told again and again of their fatal contents: and it was, perhaps, fortunate she did not; for they were undoubtedly in the handwriting of her lover, and had she seen them, in her ignorance of the whole affair her poor lacerated heart might have burst. But of her sorrow, despair, and shame at the whole affair I need not speak.

"What was the story of the drowned unfortunate, if story she had, no one in Pointe-à-Pitre knew; but all viewed Jack as being a *mauvais sujet*, a delinquent lover, and it was in vain for him, a Scotsman, a foreigner, more than all "a heretic," to attempt to arrest the storm of indignation that turned against him; so once more old Duhamel had it all his own way at the Villa de Bassompierre, while Jack abandoned alike his gun and his rod, and, what was worse, he became a species of misanthrope, and neglected his estate and all his affairs. Still he would not renounce her; a thousand wild thoughts occurred to him, and more than once the wild scheme of carrying her off by force to some of the British or Spanish islands occurred to him, till at last the scheme took a tangible form. He resolutely—as speedily as he could—turned all his possessions into cash, and, without informing me of his purpose, purchased and prepared for her reception a small polacca of some sixty tons, which he kept at anchor in the harbour of Le Petit Cul de Sac, about a mile distant only from the villa of the Bassompierres.

"His great knowledge of the whole island, especially in the vicinity of her abode, afforded him every facility for carrying out his plans, and he hoped, by watching sedulously for an opportunity, that he should be able to persuade Otillie to elope with him, or to carry her off, so maddened was he by the

whole turn of affairs, and more than all by the rumour now current in Pointe-à-Pitre that, to elude a marriage with Pierre Duhamel, she was about to enter a convent.

"The vicinity of the villa to Le Petit Cul de Sac was favourable to my brother's plans, and he conceived that, if they were once married under any circumstances, the opposition of M. Bassompierre would cease, and if not, it would matter little. The master and crew of the polacca were puzzled to know for what purpose she lay there inactive, and why her owner spent the entire day rambling about the shore, with a boat's crew waiting for him at a certain place. A few days passed over thus, and the monotony of them fevered the now impatient and agitated heart of my brother, till he almost contemplated a visit to the villa and seeking Otillie in person, at the head of four coloured seamen, whose services he had secured by bribery.

"One evening, accompanied by these men, he had crept nearer the villa than usual; there was no moon, yet the wood-covered hills and the waving cornbrakes seemed to emit thousands of glittering sparks, for the fire-flies were shooting among the trees, and the beetles covered their stems and branches. The weather was louring, there was a heavy ground-swell in the bay, and the polacca strained at her anchor as her bows rose and fell upon the heavy rollers. Ere long thunder began to roll as it only rolls in the Caribbee isles, and La Soufrière began to spout up vast sheets of red sulphurous light. It was probably this that brought Otillie into the verandah to behold the coming storm, which my brother did not heed; for all Jack's thoughts were of her, and a low cry of joy escaped him as he beheld her.

"'Otillie, my own! my own!' he exclaimed, and threw an arm round her. A gasping sob escaped her, and she fainted. Love, exultation, and the desperation of the moment endued Jack with a strength which in reality he did not otherwise possess, and he bore her as if she had been a child to where the boat awaited them.

"As fast as possible they all leaped on board and shoved off with their still insensible freight; but she began to revive, no doubt, when the boat was pulled out of the creek, as her cries of terror are said to have been heard from the shore. But

these soon ceased, as she became soothed or reconciled to flight, and was speedily on board. The polacca had been hove short on her anchor; the latter was soon apeak; her sails were cast loose, and before a heavy gale of wind she put to sea, and her white canvas soon vanished in the wrack and vapour that fast overspread the ocean.

"The night of Otillie's escape or abduction—which you will—is still remembered with interest in Guadaloupe. A dreadful storm, one of those sudden and awful tempests peculiar to the West Indies, came on. The thunder rolled among the mountain peaks in awful peals, and the brilliant lightning by its flashes shed a horrid wildness upon the scenery. High over all bellowed La Soufrière, shooting skyward its sheets of sulphury flame. The din was so great that at Marie Galante, Les Saintes, and St. Martin it was thought to be the booming of cannon. The whole sky was red and fiery, and tempests of wind furrowed and seemed to tear open the bosom of the sea, rolling its waters far in upon the land. No such hurricane had been known since the October of 1780; and amid it my unfortunate brother, the hapless Otillie, and all who were with them must have perished, for not a vestige or trace of the polacca was ever seen again."

Such was one of the many stories told in the cabin of the *Queen* to while away the monotony occasioned by the head-wind.

"Well," thought Stanley, "if these two unfortunates perished, there was at least true love between them; and this old fellow, Jack Melville, had not been, like *me*, subjected to the treacherous caprice of a coquette—'the fascination which a snake exercises over its victim.'"

Poor Milly, a snake! Had it come to this with him?

The next day was a lovely one; the breeze was somewhat aft, and consequently Captain Parker was in the best of humours.

"Glad to see you less in the downs, captain," said Stanley, when the former came on deck.

"We'll set more canvas on her now, sir; and if the breeze serves, by this time to-morrow," replied Parker, "we shall sight the Azores. Cast loose the royals."

A few hands sprang aloft cheerily, and soon the gaskets were off and the bunt dropped ; then the orders speedily followed :

" Sheet home, fore and main-royal !"

" Hoist away !" came the shout from aloft.

" Overhaul your clewlines ;" and so forth.

Under a spread of canvas the sharp clipper-ship flew on, and the face of Parker brightened as he cast his eyes over the white bellying sails, and then over the quarter.

" Yes, Captain Stanley," he resumed, " by this time to-morrow I hope to show you the hills of San Miguel."

He spoke with the perfect confidence a good seaman has in his reckoning and navigation. The day, I have said, was lovely ; no foam flecked the vast expanse of sea ; no cloud obscured the brilliance of the sunshine or the clear blue sky. But alas for appearances so deceptive ! None on board of that stately ship could have foreseen the night that was to follow.

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### VANITAS VANITATUM.

As her party was late in returning from Brighton, Mrs. Brooke did not see Mabel, supposing, of course, that she had retired early, as the poor girl had sadly moped since Seymour's expulsion—for such it was—from Thaneshurst ; but as she wished to confer with her concerning a great dinner-party they were to have next day, she sent for her betimes in the morning, the moment Mr. Brooke had left their room. The servant was some time in returning ; so the lady, usually impatient, rang angrily, almost viciously, a blue and gold Sèvres hand-bell which stood on the little tripod table at her bedside, and, like a slave of the lamp, her abigail appeared, with a somewhat startled expression of face.

" Please, mum, Miss Brooke ain't in her room," said Polly Plum.

" Not in her room at *this* hour of the morning, Plum ?"

" No, mum. I don't know, but—but—but—"

" But *what*, Plum ?"

" Her bed don't seem to have been slept in."

"Her bed! What are you saying?"

"Ye-es, mum."

"Not slept in!" exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, sitting bolt upright in bed now.

"No; and her night-dress ain't there; and her wardrobe and drawers are all pulled strangely about," continued Polly, with a blanched cheek and trembling while she spoke; "and the hashes of letters she's been a-burning are all over the place."

"You are mad or stupid," said Mrs. Brooke, now, however, trembling in turn.

"Oh, no, mum, please, I ain't," urged Polly, weeping with fear and bewilderment, though inspired by the burning curiosity of her class.

Mrs. Brooke now sprang from bed, corpulent though she was, with considerable agility.

"Give me my dressing-robe, girl, quickly, as you value your place!"

Hastily and with tremulous hands the maid assisted Mrs. Brooke to invest her ample and rotund figure in an elaborately-worked and profusely-flowered *négligé*, and she went in hot haste to inspect her daughter's empty room.

It was all indeed as the servant had reported. But on the toilet-table lay a little note addressed to herself, and she tore it open. It contained but three lines from Mabel, imploring pardon and pity, for, as her life was miserable, she had run away with Tom Seymour!

With grief and terror, she scarcely knew of what, Mrs. Brooke uttered a loud cry and flung herself furiously down into a fauteuil, sorely testing the strength thereof as she did so; while the cry brought her nephew, who was passing, with a genuine expression of surprise in his face, to the door of the room. "Hallo, aunt," said he; "what's the row?"

She groaned, handed him Mabel's note, and pointed to the empty bed. As he read, his green eyes filled with a baleful glare, his face became very pale as he took a hasty survey of the room, and an oath escaped him.

"It is all but too plain, aunt," said he; "the birds have flown together."

"Birds!—what birds?" said she drearily.

"Mabel and that scoundrel Seymour!"

"Bring your uncle to me, Alf; he is in the garden. I shall go mad! I shall die!" she exclaimed, as she rocked herself to and fro.

"I suppose they will have been married before a registrar —mighty respectable that!" said he. "I never could have believed she was so insanely in love with that selfish beggar," he added, as if he, Foxley, was the embodiment of generosity, liberality, and purity of intention; and he turned away in search of his uncle, while his heart swelled with black rage at the thought of how completely Seymour had baffled him and braved them all.

Mrs. Brooke's rage, fear, grief, yea, and shame or wounded pride, reached the point of stupefaction, and these mingled emotions rendered her for a time almost speechless. She had an overwhelming sense of the whole affair being a terrible *fiasco*. Camphor and sal volatile were freely administered; and, for this morning, the contents of her gold-mounted dressing-case, where the loveliest of crystal bottles and ivory-handled brushes reposed in light-blue velvet, were not in requisition.

Mr. Brooke did not share his wife's emotions of rage. He felt only grief for the loss of Mabel. We have elsewhere referred to the strict regularity of the household at Thaneshurst; but on this eventful morning it was fairly startled from its usual propriety. Yet such is the force of habit, or such was the stern resolve of Mr. Brooke to stifle or conceal the combined emotion of regret and shame that filled his heart for an *esclandre* or misfortune which could not be long kept private, that when he opened the Book of Common Prayer, which was laid by his cup and plate every morning as regularly as his napkin, knife, and fork, while the bell clanged, the servants took their places, ditto the often somewhat bored guests, he read steadily the morning service; but ever and anon his eyes, like those of all in the room, wandered to the vacant chair of the absent one, as if he could not realise the event, and expected her every instant to enter and seat herself as usual. Then after a while he fidgeted painfully, and polished again and again his double gold eyeglass with his silk handkerchief, and was too

much preoccupied to be ruffled even by Alf Foxley coming in during the middle of the prayers, a fashion he rather had. It may be imagined how the breakfast passed over on such a morning as this.

"Her ingratitude," said Mrs. Brooke, when she and her husband took refuge in their own room, "is monstrous—shameful! To think that a child of mine—"

"*Ours*, Martha dear," urged Mr. Brooke.

"Ours, then, could behave so, after all the love, care, and pains lavished upon her—four hundred guineas a year, including, of course, riding-lessons and silver-plate, at a West-end boarding-school—to think she could come to this! What *will* the world say? What *will* society think? We shall be the talk of all London and Sussex!"

"It won't be even a nine days' wonder," replied Mr. Brooke.

"It is scarcely credible; it seems all like a dream, from which I shall wake," said she, weeping. "Ungrateful girl! If she loved this designing interloper, whom *you* brought among us—you, John Brooke—how much more should she have loved and trusted her parents! And in whom could she have found better or truer friends?"

Worthy Mrs. Brooke forgot all about her past advice, so full of selfishness and match-making, to poor Mabel.

"She might have done worse," said Mr. Brooke, with a sigh.

"Worse! You are a fool, John Brooke; how could she have done worse? By marrying a groom or stable-boy, I suppose you mean, like some of the bad girls we read of in sensational novels—eh?"

Sensational novels were not much in Mr. Brooke's line; yet it was some such *mésalliance* that was floating in his mind.

And so this daughter—a child she had ever viewed her, to be controlled or led, spoiled or scolded, whose short frocks and vaccination, teething, schooling, and holidays seemed all but things of yesterday—had perpetrated an elopement, a scandal, and was *now*—she could but hope and pray and, in her pride of heart, curse it—a married woman!"

"Dear Mrs. Brooke," urged Milly gently, as she clung round that lady's neck and kissed her after a time, "what is done cannot be undone."

"But it may be *avenged!*" said Foxley savagely.

"You are right, Alf—you are right. Seymour shall not benefit by this affair. She shall be cut off without even the proverbial shilling; and not one penny of her papa's money shall go to him!"

Mr. Brooke had not his wife's—shall we call it so?—vulgar ambition in the matter of a son-in-law: but he had in common with her a reverence for the necessarily conventional forms and usages of society, a reverence that bordered on the starched, even snobbish, idea of propriety; and there was no doubt that Mabel's elopement had fearfully violated all that. Such things weren't done nowadays, except in novels or on the stage; he never read the former, and the latter he had long since forgotten all about.

To Mrs. Brooke it had ever seemed that Mabel's marriage would be one of those events on which the world of fashion must turn its axis; and here she had eloped with a mere City clerk, with a pen stuck behind his right ear—her normal idea of all clerks—and not a resplendent being in purple and fine linen, with a coronet encircled by strawberry-leaves on his perhaps empty *caput*. And this was the marriage which she had always hoped, nay, was certain, must take place in that dingy edifice, St. George's, Hanover Square, in presence of "a select circle of the upper ten," &c. &c.

O *vanitas vanitatum!* How she loathed Tom Seymour!

"Eloped! *my* daughter eloped, and with that scurvy sponger!" she would repeat till her own words lashed her into fury; "I would rather she had been found drowned in the Ouse, or dead among the downs—ay, a stiff corpse upon the grass!"

"O Mrs. Brooke," Milly would urge piteously, for she dearly loved the naughty Mabel, "don't say so, don't say so, for you do not think so; and this is all wild talk."

It had always seemed natural to Mr. Brooke that every young fellow who had the pleasure of knowing Mabel should fall in love with her. Then why not Tom Seymour as well as another? for he confidently believed there was not such another girl in the world as his Mabel; but this catastrophe was altogether unlooked for.

"By Jove," we think we hear Messrs. Soaper and Snarl, "such things don't happen every day *now!*"

"But won't this appear improbable?" says Dangle to Puff in the *Critic;* and the reply is: "A play is not to show occurrences which happen every day, but things just so strange that, though they never did, they *might* happen."

But things stranger than Mabel's elopement are referred to in every penny daily, and the agony column of the *Times*.

We have said that there was to be a dinner-party at Thaneshurst on this eventful day. On first waking poor Mrs. Brooke's thoughts had run only on the decorations of the table, and her mind had been much exercised as to whether she should have the fern, vine-leaf, passion-flower, or rose-pattern damask; and now—*now* her mind was chaos. All that day there was a strange and unpleasant hush and air of mystery in and about Thaneshurst, as if a death or some such domestic calamity had taken place. Mr. Mulbery the butler, Digweed the gardener, the tall "Jeames's," even the too often irrepressible Polly Plum, all moved about with bated voices and stealthy steps. Not a door was opened or shut or a bell clanged unnecessarily; and a *sense* of this new observance worried and shamed Mrs. Brooke's pride more and more. It was aggravating!

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### PARTED!

THE dinner-party assembled in state; carriage after carriage came rolling down the avenue, depositing its freight of guests; and there were the usual stereotyped greetings and congratulations, introductions and general hollowness common to such gatherings. How, even with her innate love of show and splendour, Mrs. Brooke abhorred it all, on such a day as this, needs not to be described.

Mr. Brooke seemed manifestly "upset;" a cloud was over all somehow; even champagne could not dispel it; the alleged illness of Miss Brooke (such was the wretched story resorted to for the time) must be serious, all thought; and more especially did Dr. Clavicle, who was there, think it odd that *he* was not requested to see her. And thus, despite the talents of the cook and the libations of Mr. Mulbery, the banquet passed over heavily, even silently; and Mrs.

Brooke had but one thought. How was Mabel's non-appearance to be accounted for in the days to come? Eventually "the murder" must come out.

That Tom would be kind and loving to her Mr. Brooke never questioned; but in the midst of his undoubtedly just ire and mortification one question seemed always to hover on his lips, and one craving was in his heart—*where* was his Mabel then, and what was she doing?

"We are certainly a deadly-lively lot!" whispered Foxley to Milly Allingham, who, like the Conyers and others in the secret, began to feel herself already *de trop* at Thaneshurst. In the drawing-room it was worse, and Mrs. Brooke would have found herself the better for "a good cry;" she was, for the first time, so nervous while acting her part of hostess.

All were thankful when the last guest drove away—all save the luckless Mr. Brooke, for *his* time, *à la* Caudle, was coming. And this family calamity had occurred at the very time when, after a thousand urgings and arguments, Mrs. Brooke, whose great ambition it was to see "her John" in Parliament, had prevailed upon him to offer himself for the representation of Hole-cum-Corner or some such place, where he had undoubted influence. Now this was not to be thought of, and she shuddered at the idea of the opposition or the rabble at the hustings getting hold of Mabel's escape and making a popular cry of it.

How the old maids of the adjacent village and of Lewes, over their dishes of tea and scandal, their cakes and Sally Lunns, would exult at the whole affair! But *their* interest, or malevolence, in the matter was, to Mrs. Brooke's mind, small indeed when contrasted with *how* she was to explain it to, or ignore it with, her fashionable friends in Tyburnia. The laughter, the sneers of the many eligible and really presentable young fellows whose attentions she had not tolerated, because they had not, even like that brainless Scotch snob the Master of Badenoch, the reversion of a title (one, perhaps, degraded enough in the times of old)—all rose in fancy vividly before her.

But there came a time of course, when the affair could not longer be concealed; and gradually from the servants' hall at Thaneshurst, it spread far and wide, in a thousand various

forms, till it reached even Val Reynolds in his quarters at Knightsbridge, where Larkspur was on a visit.

"Eloped, and with that fellow who can't keep his saddle! why the girl must be a howling lunatic!" exclaimed the tall Guardsman when he heard of it; but our noble friend Dundreary is not the only man who deems all whose tastes or opinion differ from his own as mad, and says, "He is a lunatic, he is."

The lisped-out consolations and feeble condolences of the Rev. Alban Butterley, however well timed and well meant, were intensely repugnant to the pride of Mrs. Brooke, whose wrath far exceeded any emotion of grief; and so great was the former emotion in her heart, that when she received a short bewildered letter of Mabel's from Ostend, telling briefly that they had been privately married at Brighton, and full of prayers to be forgiven—prayers for herself and for Tom, who was so good and kind and gentle; and how the marriage-service had made her cry, and she was so stupid and had had a headache all the rest of the day, and expressing in moving terms the fondest love for her papa and mamma—she tore the letter into the smallest shreds, and threw them into the fire. So it remained unanswered.

"Ostend! what a place to spend a honeymoon in!" sneered Alf; "but of course that stingy beggar Seymour couldn't think of Paris."

In truth, Tom at that time could not have afforded to do so; but Mabel and he only wanted the forgiveness of the old folks at Thaneshurst to feel their happiness perfect, as they wandered together on the great green earthen mounds that surrounded the old Belgian town, and watched the steamers come and go between the long quays of the canal that leads to the English Channel; and his complete knowledge that they were so, and that to them the bleak Ostend was now as the Rose-garden of Irem, increased the bitterness of Foxley's hate to fever heat.

"Hard it is for the man or woman who marries to please everybody in so doing;" and in her nuptials Mabel had, to say the least of it, intensely displeased her parents and her amiable cousin Alf, who saw all chance of her money being his gone for ever, unless Mr. Brooke altered his will—and he

had moments of indignation, in which Alf did not despair of Mr. Brooke being tempted to do so—in *his* favour; and that was all he wanted. How true is the old Spanish proverb, "God will be God when *gold* is gone!"

But between these transports of anger the old man sorely and sadly missed his daughter—his only pet lamb, the apple of his eye, which ever and anon fell on the *vacant place*. He felt very bitter at Tom then, certainly; but he could not revile with the bitterness his wife wished "that Seymour," the husband in whose bosom she lay. He mooned about the garden and grounds, deeming himself a kind of King Lear; but a well-fed, well-clad, and well-to-do King Lear, who nevertheless felt, like that potentate,

> "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
> To have a thankless child."

But poor Mabel, though she had been undutiful and rash, was full of love and tenderness for both her parents, and more than all for him who had never been harsh to her. Yet Mrs. Brooke's indignation seemed to increase as time passed on. She never could get used to the idea that all her ambitious schemes had been nipped in the bud, knocked on the head, or shattered like Alnaschar's basket of glass; and in every way she sought to inflame her husband against the runaways.

"To think of our Mabel," she would often say—"our Mabel, so petted, treasured, and trusted; a girl so calculated to shine in society—in the bloom of her girlhood throwing herself away upon a fellow—'a cad,' as Alf so aptly calls him—who had no right to raise his eyes above the young woman who sells Berlin wool in a bazaar, who makes fancy-work in a manufactory, or a barmaid at a railway buffet—it is intolerable!"

And so on she would rail for hours; while some such meek response from Brooke, to the effect that she was "wrong in speaking of Tom thus, as he was undoubtedly a gentleman, and his father had been the king of good fellows," only made matters worse, poured oil upon the flames, and brought Mrs. Brooke's bitterest malison on both father and son; and that, as for the matter of being "a gentleman," the man was only one who had plenty of money, which Seymour certainly had *not*.

Mabel's favourite horse was sold by order of her mother; her birds were banished to the servants' hall; her music was destroyed; and her memory was sought by that irate lady to be effaced at Thaneshurst as completely as if she had committed a crime. Her father sighed at all this: to him it seemed as if Mabel were dead; for what is separation but a living death? He had often thought, by affectionate anticipation, of the fatal time—fatal, at least, to him—when he should have to do without his darling, and when the light and joy of her presence would be transferred to the home of another; and now *the time had come!*

But where was that home? Day succeeded day in dulness; he never heard of her or of her whereabouts; he could only know vaguely that Tom was back at his desk and she was in London somewhere; but *where* he knew not. The time passed slowly too with Mrs. Brooke. Save Milly Allingham and Fanny Conyers, all their visitors had betaken themselves elsewhere; and she was so greatly pre-occupied with her own thoughts, that much parochial work—for with all her selfishness she really joined other ladies in it—was forgotten. Thus many old women went without their tea, and some old men used bad language on finding themselves left without their tobacco.

At last there came a morning which Milly was never to forget. After breakfast the contents of the household letter-bag were distributed, as usual, by Mr. Mulbery.

"Letters! letters!" exclaimed Fanny Conyers, with all a girl's glee. Ladies are so fond of receiving letters, much more than their male relations.

There were some gossiping notes for Milly from friends. These she read wearily, for they still recurred, even now, to the "foolish, not to say worse of it, act of Mabel Brooke," and so forth. There were the share-lists for Mr. Brooke, *Bell's Life* from a betting-agent, and an *Era* from Aimée, containing doubtless some notice of herself, for Alf Foxley's delectation. There were other enclosures which he did not relish so much, in thin blue envelopes, formally addressed and initialled, on extremely blue paper, which he pocketed with a grunt. Deuced well he knew the contents of these—"to amount of account rendered;" large bills to make up on

a certain day; "cheque by return will oblige," &c.; and lastly, there was an evening paper from Val Reynolds, addressed to Mr. Brooke—a circumstance so unusual that, after carefully wiping his spectacles, he scanned all its columns till he came to a marked paragraph, which instantly riveted his attention.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed.

"Something about our unhappy girl, I presume, in print at last," said Mrs. Brooke, with that asperity which had now become habitual to her; till her husband, raising his voice read the following:

"Supposed Disaster at Sea.—The captain of the *Sapphire*, Southampton liner from Tampico, reports that on the 10th instant, when off the north-western quarter of the Azores, he passed through a great quantity of wreckage, indicating that some large ship must have gone down thereabout. The fractures in the spars were all *fresh*, and shoals of fish were about them. Three buckets and several dead bodies were floating near. He secured the former, and they were marked, '*Queen of Britain*, Southampton;' so there cannot be a doubt that a most calamitous wreck has occurred in these waters. Fortunately the insurances at Lloyd's will cover all loss. She must have gone down with all hands on board, as the *Sapphire* cruised for sixteen hours about the place, and no boats were visible even from the mainmast head."

'*Queen of Britain*!' exclaimed Alf, looking up from his *Era*. "By jingo, uncle, that was the ship by which Captain Stanley sailed. You remember?"

"Too well," replied the old gentleman, taking off his spectacles. "I hope nothing has happened to the poor fellow. Insurances at Lloyd's won't cover the loss of human life."

When Mr. Brooke had ended this fatal and startling paragraph, poor Milly, who had been busy with her frivolous letters, felt that her pallor deepened to the hue of Carrara marble, and that her lips became pale. She stared wildly round her, and with a moan—a moan from her inner heart, as it were—she sank back in her chair as if paralysed, and covered her face with her hot tremulous hands. So much tribulation had been in Thaneshurst lately, and so much

emotion exhibited, that perhaps Milly cared less about giving way thus to that remorse which was known to herself alone. However, as scenes are only permissible on the stage, she rapidly recovered herself, and said with some confusion :

" It is so horrible to think that one—one so recently among us—one of our own circle—has perished thus. And—and—the paper says the ship must have gone down with all—all hands on board."

So they were parted for ever—for ever by death. Can any conviction be more incomprehensible, more unrealisable to true love and to the true mourner? She had once hope, that element without which we could not exist.

" Hope springs eternal in the human breast," says Pope. So Milly had hoped, against time and separation, that Seymour's letters to Stanley would explain that miserable mistake at Brighton, and that eventually all should yet be well; but now everything was indeed over.

" Oh, what must he think of me?" had often been her wail: *now* he could think no more.

He had been—how terrible it was to think of him in the *past* tense!—so different from all the men she had ever met in that silly whirlpool misnamed " Society," that gathering of selfish fools. He had been to her the reality of all that was refined and elevated, winning and attractive, in men; and yet how she had treated him! Not intentionally in the last instance; yet he had gone down to death without explanation, without being undeceived--hating, despising her, perhaps. Could he but have looked into her heart! Perhaps he knew it all now, however; and somehow she seemed to feel that his death lay at her door. Why had she trifled so with his happiness and her own? A thousand times she asked herself this, without being able to give herself any proper answer.

How deeply in thought she repented the folly and coquetry of which she had been guilty on that day in Connaught Terrace, and but for which they might have been so happy—yea, married even now!

" This is the reason why no letter ever came. Doubtless he would have written me something even to upbraid me. My darling! my darling—for ever lost to life and me!"

And so for nights her heart was wrung and her brain

whirled. Never in life had Stanley made such an impression upon her as now he did in death.

"Oh, that Mabel were here now, or that I knew where to find her!" wailed Milly at times.

Mrs. Brooke was full of her own affairs—her wrongs, her griefs, and insulted pride; even had she known of the love passages between Rowland Stanley and Milly Allingham, she would have had no time for what she must have deemed absurd sympathy: and Milly felt instinctively that she could not make a *confidante* of Fanny Conyers—"Dimples" as they called her—though she *had* seen large tears welling in her hazel eyes at the recollection of Stanley, "who was so kind to her poor boy-brother," and of his too probable fate. She longed to be with her mother. Thaneshurst had too many painful associations now; thus she prepared to set out for Wiesbaden, to which Mrs. Brooke made no objection, though her spouse, who loved the girl as Mabel's chief friend and playmate, made many.

So Milly left Harwich by the Rotterdam steamer on a lovely moonlight night, and as she passed the clanging Bell-buoy and the Skipworth floating-light, sorrowfully and bewildered, she dropped many a tear as she gazed upon that sparkling ocean, at the bottom of which she deemed her lost lover lay.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE CORAL REEF.

WE last left Captain Parker setting the royals on the *Queen*, with the wind coming more aft, and promises of land on the morrow. The day was one of unusual beauty even for these seas. The vessel bore on prosperously and monotonously; not a sail was in sight; an occasional dolphin or a flying-fish alone was seen, or now and then a nautilus spreading its purple sail on the crest of a swelling wave. And here we may remark that few people eat so little fish as sailors, for the strange reason that few fish are to be found at sea, nor are they to be caught in water more than fifty fathoms deep.

Exhilarated by the brilliance of the day and the rarity of

the atmosphere, Stanley felt his spirits rise, and he was already looking forward with pleasure to rejoining his regiment, and a reunion with his comrades, the mess with all its associations, and so forth, though a vast extent of sea was still to be traversed ere he saw the Bermudas. More than all, he was already becoming consoled, or rather the sense of bitter mocking slight he conceived Miss Allingham to have put upon him was growing less poignant. A new novelist says truly, "that our age is free, and that the disappointed lover is no longer under any sort of necessity to become a respectable cynic. We know perfectly well that a time arrives when the reality comes to an end, and when any farther demonstration thereof becomes fictitious and *dramatic*."

Beautiful though the day, the glass was found to be falling fast, and the wind was rising; so ere long the royals were sent down, the topgallant sails and studding sails reduced. The wind increased to a gale after sunset, and though the night promised to be a rough one, everything had a prosperous aspect; there was no moon, but the stars shone clearly between the masses of flying clouds that careered across the sky.

Eight bells had just been struck, calling the middle watch, which is on duty from twelve at night till four in the morning, when there was a sudden shout from the forecastle of "Breakers ahead!" an alarm that brought on deck in hot haste all who had not "turned in," and among these were Stanley, Mr. Melville, and the captain, who, without a moment of delay, hove the ship to in stays, and ordered soundings to be taken. Right ahead could be seen a line of foam curling over a long half-sunken rock, or reef, that was not indicated in any chart possessed by Parker or his mates.

"Double reef the topsails," was now his order, as the wind was found to be increasing; and at that moment the *Queen* struck with a dreadful crash, which threw flat on deck all who were not in the rigging. The ship swung round off the reef with the loss of her rudder, however; it was torn away from the pintles, thus rendering her quite unmanageable, for she struck again with greater violence on her starboard bow, and swinging broadside heavily on the reef, became bilged in a moment.

The first emotions of consternaion and alarm, at a catastrophe so sudden and altogether so unexpected, were succeeded by those of horror, and in their night-dresses some woman and children in the steerage came swarming on deck. No vestige of land was in sight anywhere ; the rock was in the open sea, and must have been, as Captain Parker said, some coral formation near the shoal of Vigia, which lies midway between San Miguel and those dangerous rocks called Baxo das Carvelhas ; and this eventually proved to be the case. Self-preservation now seemed to be the sentiment that reigned in every breast, and the steerage passengers clamorously called on Captain Parker to give all the assistance he could to rescue those who were in his charge from the too obvious death that was at hand.

Stanley never forgot the expression of poor Parker's face at that moment. He was a brave man and a thorough seaman ; but he was a husband and a father, and his heart died within him as he thought of a little cottage, far, far away, on the Essex side of the Thames, where at that moment two little angel faces were nestling together in the same crib, and of the room, on the windows of which the thickly-clustering clematis and the sweet honeysuckle pattered, where, doubtless, all unconscious of the deadly peril that so suddenly menaced him, his young wife—the wife of three years—lay hushed in sleep ; and here was he, with the wild waves of the midnight sea boiling around him like a very hell of foam.

Only those who have been in such a peril as now menaced all on board the *Queen* can know what were the emotions of such a man at such a crisis. Parker did not fear to die, as he told Stanley in a few hurried words ; but he thought with anguish of the little infants who would scarcely miss him, and of their beloved mother, on whose face he might never look again. How many an episode of love and tenderness came rushing back to memory then ! "Silence, fore and aft," he shouted with the voice of a Stentor ; and he was heard distinctly above the bellowing wind, the clamour of the passengers and crew, the cracking of the bursting timbers and sheathing, and the hiss of the waves that seemed to be rending them asunder in the tumult of their mischievous joy. He strove to soothe and console the poor people

who clung about him, who forgot their property going down into the deep, and thought only of their lives or the lives of those who were dear to them.

He besought them to restrain their terror, though his own face was sickly pale and marked by agitation ; but the poor people would not be pacified, for the impending death that seemed so close rendered them wild and desperate now. Stanley felt astonished at his own coolness ; but though he had faced storms by sea, and shot and shell by land, he had never been in a predicament like this upon the reef, and he wondered in his heart whether Milly would think of him with regret if he perished. Pshaw, what mattered it whether she did so or not ? was one thought ; the next was, that he hoped and wished she might do so. Then he smiled bitterly to think that he could consider the emotions of a heartless coquette at a time when some seventy souls were hovering on the threshold of eternity !

The pinnace was now lowered, without Parker's orders, by the exertions of Melville and one of the mates, who with three seamen endeavoured to shove off from the doomed ship ; but more than twenty persons, maddened by terror, flung themselves over her side, and by clinging to the gunwale of the boat, or to each other, swamped her, and she sank on the other side of the reef, and then a wild cry of horror and despair announced the misery of their fate. Armed with a revolver, and threatening with death any one who disobeyed his orders or attempted to quit the ship without them, Captain Parker ordered the long-boat to be launched from its chocks amidships over the main hatch.

Carefully did those engaged on this duty do their utmost to rescue themselves from an impending death ; the boat was soon heaving alongside. Stanley endeavoured to get into her, but gave place to a frantic mother with a tiny babe in her arms—the same poor woman for whom the ship had been decorated on that morning, when, as Parker said, she had been "brought to hammock." By this he missed his chance of getting into the boat ; yet lost nothing, for she was barely shoved off from the wreck when she was capsized by the surf, and floated away bottom uppermost, leaving all who had been in her sinking in the sea. Some men put on life-buoys and

plunged overboard, to reach if possible, and to right, the long-boat; but all these men, though good swimmers, perished, from the too probable circumstance that the so-called "buoys" were stuffed, not with cork, but straw or shavings—a common trick of the trade in these days.

The vessel, torn by the waves that were revelling within and around her, now went to pieces, and then all hope of preservation passed away, while the awful scene became indescribable. The entire hull broke up into many little parts, and as her ribs were iron and destitute of buoyancy these sank into the sea on each side of the reef, with all who clung to them. Stanley had clutched the wheel, which adhered to a fragment of the taffrail and a few planks of the quarter-deck. He looked round for Parker, who a moment before had been by his side, but he had disappeared; and from Stanley's lips there rose an involuntary prayer, for mercy only—hope had gone—as on this fragment of the wreck he was floated away from the reef, with two seamen clinging near him.

The work of destruction was complete now. The waves rolled over all the reef, hissing and boiling as if in wild joy at the destruction they had achieved, and of the ship there remained now but wreckage, broken spars, oars, and portions of the cargo, floating about in all directions—the wreckage a portion of which had been seen, as reported, by the captain of the *Sapphire*.

The whole of this catastrophe had been so sudden and so dreadful in its results that, but for the bodily suffering and incessant drenching to which he was subjected as the fragment of wreck was submerged again and again in the sea, Stanley might have deemed it all a dream—a feverish fantasy from which he should awake to find himself asleep in his cabin. By a fragment of rope he and his two companions lashed each an arm to the fragment of the taffrail, and could but pray that it might keep together till day dawned and some passing ship might observe them. Slowly, slowly passed the dark hours of that most fatal morning. Excitement and continued submersion in the salt water induced an intense thirst which they had no means of allaying, while the heavy strain on the mind caused a kind of drowsiness, to which they dared not give way; and so the three survivors of this event floated

away in the dark they knew not whither, but slowly on some current, as the elder seaman averred by the action of the water.

The mental sufferings of Stanley exceeded those of the body. There were ever flitting through his mind innumerable thoughts of home and friends that were far away, whom he might never see again, and who could never hear of his wretched fate. Past scenes of happiness, of brilliance and gaiety, amid which the fairy-like image of Milly flitted, came back to memory too, oddly enough jumbled up with trivial events that had long since passed from memory.

When day began to dawn it did so rapidly; in unclouded splendour the sun seemed suddenly to start from the sea, and all its waves rippled in ruddy light, purple at first, but that speedily changed to gold flecked with green and white. How anxiously, with haggard eyes, our three unfortunates swept the vast extent of water round them!

"Not a sail in sight!" they moaned in concert: and then gazed at each other hopelessly and vacantly, to turn again and again to the horizon, where the faintest indication of a sail, or of asteamer's smoke, even though quite hull down, would have been a welcome object to their aching eyes, which were already bloodshot and inflamed.

The gale of the night had passed away, and the sea was almost as calm as an inland lake. To those three so sore athirst, rain would have been welcome; but the sky was cloudless. Hour after hour passed; they took no heed of the time, but reclining or half standing by the piece of wreck to which they had secured themselves, lest they might slip off into the sea, and be too weak to regain it, they continued to float monotonously, sadly, and wearily, in what art or direction they knew not, and there, upon the wide waste of the Atlantic, mattered little now.

Suddenly, about noon, one of the seamen shaded his eyes with his hand as he looked eastward. His eyes dilated; then he seemed to concentrate them on some object, while an expression of joy stole over his face.

"What do you see?" asked Stanley.

"Land!"

"Land?" exclaimed his companions.

"I do, sir; thank God!" continued the first, with something like a sob in his throat.

"I can see nothing," said Stanley piteously. "I hope it is not a delusion, a fancy."

"Oh, no, sir; there it is—a blue streak, and only about fifteen miles off."

"You are right, Bill!" exclaimed his messmate; "land it is. I thought I saw the blink of it an hour ago, but feared to say so."

Stanley now saw what their more practised eyes had so instantly detected, a blue streak like the edge of a cloud, but remaining steadily on the horizon. Of course it would have seemed larger and loftier, nearer and more distinct, if viewed from the deck of a ship; but as their eyes were almost on a level with the water, their horizon was consequently greatly circumscribed.

"It must be one of the Azores," said Stanley. "Poor captain expected to sight them about noon to-day."

"Exactly, sir," said the sailor cheerfully; "some craft will be sure to fall in with us now, as all ships keep on this side of San Miguel, as the Ants, some dangerous rocks, lie on the other; and by Jove, sir, San Miguel it is! That is the headland called the Pointe da Norte; and it rises so fast that a current and the wind too take us towards it."

The man spoke truly, for even to Stanley's unprofessional eye it was evident that the dark-blue object had somewhat changed in form, and risen from the horizon.

"Still," thought he, "it may be cloud;" and his heart sank again, though in their perfect confidence of their own observation the two seamen shook hands cordially, and then, seeing the expression of sadness and doubt in his face, the one called Bill said kindly,

"Don't be cast down, sir; I can assure you that Tom and I have been too often up aloft on the outlook not to know the land when we see it. I only wish we had an oar or spar of any kind, on which to hoist my jacket, for it may be long enough before any of these Portuguese lubbers may see us from the shore."

After they had floated eastward for another hour it became indisputably evident to Stanley that it was a rocky coast,

and hope and joy gathered in his breast, together with many a regretful thought of the ship and all that had perished with her.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### THE ISLE OF SAN MIGUEL.

LONG and intently did the three companions, Stanley, with Bill and Tom (their other names he never learned), continue to gaze at the shore; so intently that they did not perceive a long low boat with a large lateen sail that was running down quickly towards them from the seaward, till a voice hailing startled them, and on turning they saw her, like an apparition that had started out of the water, within less than a mile of them. She was coming on under a great spread of canvas right before the wind, and rolling heavily from side to side, with the white foam flying on each side of her sharp prow as it cleft the bright-green water.

Again the hail came floating across it in some foreign language. With united voices the three responded to what ultimately proved to be a shout in Portuguese; and in a few minutes the boat with shortened sail came sheering alongside the piece of wreck, which her crew, consisting of six dark and athletic fellows, surveyed with genuine interest expressed in their dark glittering eyes.

Three of them were naked to the waist; all wore trowsers of tarry canvas, girt by coarse sashes or leathern girdles, in which formidable-looking *cuchillos* were stuck; all wore earrings, and were moustached and bearded, swarthy and brawny, and were certainly as like pirates or cut-throats as any that ever figured as such on the boards of a minor theatre; yet they proved to be only worthy and industrious Portuguese fishermen belonging to Ribiera Grande, in the island of San Miguel, with a cargo of fish, having been casting their nets over-night in the vicinity of the Baxo das Carvelhas, as Bill the seaman, who had made several voyages to the Tagus (and thus knew something of their language), discovered as soon as they were drawn on board and their piece of wreck taken in tow, for the value of the fine oaken and brass-mounted wheel which formed a portion thereof. Then the lateen sail

was once more spread to the wind, and again the fisher-boat was bearing in for the land.

Their rescue was as sudden and unexpected as the catastrophe of the preceding midnight; and Stanley could scarcely realise the fact that he was once again in perfect safety till his nerves were strung by a stiff glass of cognac-and-water given him by old Pedro del Gada, the skipper of the boat, which was run straight into a little wooded bay, and there, when the sails were taken in, was moored alongside a little jetty of rough stones.

"What is to be done now?" was Stanley's first thought, as in his sodden garments he stepped ashore on what he knew was foreign ground, without a coin in his pocket, and surveyed the wooded bay; the same place, as it eventually proved, where John Vanderbrugen, the merchant of Bruges, landed in 1439, when he discovered these isles on being driven there by stress of weather, after which they were taken possession of by the Portuguese.

The scenery was beautiful and the greenery most refreshing to the eye; the coast was high and undulating, precipitous and densely wooded. About a mile distant from the shore a white-walled villa was visible, and to this edifice Pedro del Gada pointed, telling Bill, the interpreter *pro tem.*, that it was the residence of the English consul—a most fortunate coincidence. How was he named?

The Senhor Vincente de Vega, who was known in Terceira, Fayal, and Pica, and everywhere else, as one of the greatest exporters of wine, oranges, and coffee, in the Azores. This was encouraging; but would the senhor believe their story of being shipwrecked? He knew Pedro del Gada; so Pedro would accompany them to the house and be their guide. And here again did Stanley feel mortified by the want of his purse as they proceeded inland. On both sides of the road were orange and lemon groves, fields of Indian corn, yams, and extensive vineyards, and by the wayside grew many plants and flowers peculiar to Britain; the birds and animals afield were all English; the beauty and fertility of the scenery were very pleasing and striking; for there, as yet, no iron horse sent up its shriek, and no long line of railway invaded the valleys by its straightness and monotony; while,

tempered by the breeze from the sea, coming over thousands of miles of water, the rarity and purity of the atmosphere were delicious. An avenue of gorgeous red and white rose-trees in full bloom, and loading the air with fragrance, led to the villa, which was large, lofty, and built in the old Portuguese style: a skeleton of woodwork first built by the carpenter, and afterwards completed by the mason, who fills up the interstices with stone and brick. The whole of the first story seemed a magazine, as through the open windows could be seen hundreds of wine-pipes and boxes of golden oranges —the famous St. Michael oranges so well known in England. Round the windows of the attic story, which in a Portuguese house is always accounted the most pleasant, there rose a balcony, shaded by the projection of the roof, ornamented with gilt iron rails, and provided with linen and silk awnings for the accommodation of ladies, who in Portuguese households usually sit there on cushions in hot weather, reading, sewing, or amusing themselves. Its roof was flat, without chimneys, as grates and fireplaces are unknown in that part of the world—a warm cloak in winter being the substitute for a fire.

Numerous clerks and porters, all clad in light dresses, were busy at work in the lower story, and several servants, male and female, were flitting about in the upper ones; and these Stanley eventually found to be all of a mixed race; for though these isles belong to Portugal the inhabitants are the descendants of Spaniards, Flemings, and, in many instances, English and Irish, particularly in Terceira.

The senhor consul was absent at Angra, in the isle of Terceira, on business with the governor, who resides there, and would not be back for many days, the head-clerk informed Pedro del Gada; but here was the Senhora de Vega, who would tell him all about it; and as Stanley turned he found himself almost face to face with a young lady of very remarkable beauty, who stood, fan in hand, on the upper step of a flight that led to the entrance door, whence she was looking at him and his two forlorn-like companions, with an expression of surprise and wonder in her charming little face.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MABEL MARRIED.

ON their return from their economical little wedding-trip to Ostend—a trip never to be forgotten by either while life lasted—Tom took Mabel to the boarding-house in which he usually resided, in one of those thoroughfares off Harley Street, into which its windows opened; and there, of a necessity, she was daily left for hours alone, as he had now gone back to his official duties; and often during these hours she sat with her cheek resting in her hand, gazing along the street, with vague wonder that, though she had always lived in London she had never seen this place before, or perhaps been nearer to it than Oxford Street.

A long and rather gloomy thoroughfare, of most monotonous brick houses, extending all the way from Cavendish Square to the Marylebone Road, it is one of the many streets planned north of Tyburn Road by the Duke of Chandos and the Earl of Carnarvon so far back as 1715, but it was not completed till 1770, in the days when all London was agog about the strange story of the beautiful Duchess of Kingston, when Captain Cook was voyaging in Otaheite, and my Lord Mansfield was in bad odour with the Cockneys for having the misfortune to be a north Tweeder. And not far from them stands Harley House, where whilom dwelt a Queen of Oude, and had her unholy sacrifices to Kali; in memory whereof, or as the result thereof, its locality is still haunted by the ghost of a black dog with luminous eyes.

But pretty Mabel thought of none of these things, but only of Tom, as she sat alone, looking into the street, to add to the normal dulness of which on the opposite side was a huge smoke-darkened mansion, the window-blinds of which were always down, and before the large black double door of which, with its great bronze knockers, lay a quantity of wet and muddy straw, thus indicating that sickness, suffering, or it might be death, was within. In the intensity of her love for Tom and in the novelty of newly-wedded life, of her first unfettered companionship with him, she did not in the least regret the step she had taken; yet when he was absent at his duties, as

the long dull hours stole on, she could not help *thinking*, perhaps contrasting her present with her past surroundings.

The drawing-room and all in it looked so soiled and worn; sorely did the walls want repapering and the ceiling fresh painting. The few chromos, in cheap frames, were garish and vulgar, while the old-fashioned and great oblong horsehair sofa, with its two black pillows, seemed strange and grim to her eyes after the appurtenances of Park Lane and Thaneshurst. The square piano, with scarcely an action, was unlike anything she had ever met before. The dim light stole in through the dingy holland blinds, while antimacassars, like clothes to dry, hung over everything; and save the tick of an old clock on the mantelpiece, the wheezing of an old lady in a green shade in spectacles, who talked everlastingly in a corner, all was still, unless a hansom rattled past.

In the boarding-house she was an object of interest, of curiosity, and, of course, a little malevolence to some of the spinsters and supposed widows, who had speculations and doubts. She wore a wedding-ring, true, and Seymour called her his wife; but wedding-rings are easily bought—more easily worn; "and strange things are always happening in the world of London, my dear; and this may be all gammon and spinach. Did you see the marriage in the *Times*, for *I* didn't?" and so on. The landlady was sure she had; the honour of her house required that she should say so. She was a sworn old spinster, never wedded, yet call "Mrs." for respectability's sake, and usually in cold weather wore a miraculous catskin tippet, meant to pass muster for ermine.

In blissful ignorance poor Mabel, so sweetly innocent and pure, only counted the hours of Tom's daily absence, and dreaded to go out alone, lest she should meet, on foot or in their carriages, any of her former friends. She felt under a cloud now. Every mother of a family would reprehend her elopement, and she had somehow learned that even her friends the Conyers had been forbidden to visit her. She was married now certainly, and that important fact *had* been announced to the nation in the *Times;* yet she could not talk about her new house or home; she had no visitors to receive, no presents to show; she was a bride, yet in that dull boarding-house she

could not give herself those "newly-married" airs which sit so sweetly on a lovely young girl.

Though a decided favourite with certain frisky old gentlemen boarders, who were quite disposed to soothe and console her in Seymour's absence, she had never felt so *triste* and strange before. She had no congenial friends about her with whom she could exchange the gossip, the experiences of newly-married life in her new home. Oh, was it a home? would be her next thought. The first few weeks of that life were creeping on, and though Tom was all the world to her, girl-like she had the desire to tell of the balls and dinners to which she might once have been invited; of fêtes, of parties to the theatre or the Opera, which could only be enjoyed when Tom could procure an order; and though she was but in Harley Street the old house in Park Lane seemed a long, long way off now. Should she ever be there again?

She who was wont to have as many servants waiting upon her as there were slaves of the lamp was now obliged to be content with a London maid-of-all-work, her nose adorned, as usual, with the inevitable black smudge. But when such ideas thrust themselves upon her, the unselfish girl would blush, for they seemed to reprehend Tom. She did not repine; yet she often thought of the lovely gardens at Thaneshurst, where now the sunshine would be so bright and the glad birds singing; and she thought how delicious it would be to be there now, and to bury her face among the cool damp red and white moss-roses that she could remember so well, damp with the morning dew. How gladly old Digweed would give her a bouquet.

And Mabel never, never ceased to surmise *what* all were doing now at Thaneshurst, especially "poor papa and mamma." A little time and they would be in town perhaps. Yet after all that had happened they might not come *now*.

Though never a word of all this escaped her, Seymour felt conscious that some such thoughts must naturally be passing in her mind, as they were for ever passing through his own; and sometimes when they walked in the Regent's Park in the October evenings, and the brown leaves were beginning to fall, or they sat on the green summit of Primrose Hill and saw the myriad lights of London twinkling out amid the deepening

haze, Tom would speak on the subject. "O Mabel, love," he once said, "I consider now that I have been most selfish in luring you from so luxurious a home, especially when there was no rival in the way."

"You could have no rival with me, darling. O Tom," she added, peeping up slily at him, "I do begin to think you are wearying of me already."

"Wearying of you—O Mabel!" (etcetera). "Never can I be grateful enough to you for the sacrifice you have made."

"Sacrifice, darling?"

"Yes."

"How, Tom?"

"A girl like you might have had the choice of a hundred husbands; but you had only one birthright, and you gave it up——"

"For you, Tom—for you!" and her sweet lips pressed to his arrested all he would say further; but as he looked into her soft and smiling face he thought what a delicious dream life with her would be, with such a cash account at Coutts's as might enable him to place his idol in a fitting shrine.

Willing to stoop to any concession for her sake, he wrote a pathetic letter to Mr. Brooke, entreating pardon for himself and Mabel, and taking upon himself the whole blame of all that had occurred; and almost by return of post he received at his office a reply so sharp and harsh in tone that he could not doubt but "Martha dear" had been at the old gentleman's side while he penned it:

Thaneshurst, October 20.

"Sir,—You have stolen from her home and the path of obedience a daughter who before was above and beyond all reproach—my only child Mabel. Your conduct has been that of a villain and a fortune-hunter, and I mourn it for your dead father's sake; but you shall not benefit thereby, as I have sworn your wife shall be a dowerless one, and I have now no child to inherit my hard-won fortune." ("He has a nephew though," was Tom's passing thought.) "Mabel is our daughter no more, and never again need you address me on this subject.

JOHN BROOKE.

"T. Seymour, Esq."

As this letter was addressed in Foxley's handwriting he too would seem to have infused some of his wonted bitterness and malice into the tenor of its composition ; and Tom tore it up into the smallest shreds, aware that to show it, or even to communicate its contents to Mabel, would be certain to wound her sensitive nature.

With regard to Mrs. Brooke, Seymour—though he would gladly have stood well with her—had no compunction whatever. She was now irrevocably his mother-in-law ; but he felt that he owed much to old Mr. Brooke, who had ever been his friend : and that regard he had repaid, as the letter taunted him, by *stealing* his daughter, an accusation that sank deep in Tom's heart, because he felt there was truth in it. But he could not help "stealing" her ; and doubtless would have done it again.

Poor Seymour ! One moment he silently and bitterly upbraided himself for depriving her of luxuries and splendours that once surrounded her : and the next he felt giddy with joy and happiness to find this lovely and loving little creature placing all her future in his hands, regretting nothing, fearing nothing, and hoping everything, glad only to think that she loved him, and that he loved her, and her only, above and beyond all other women ; that each was now irrevocably bound to the other until death did part them ; and grim death, even in that scurvy dwelling near Harley Street, seemed, thank God, a long, long way off yet.

To Tom Seymour the wreck of the *Queen*, and the supposed death of his old friend Rowland Stanley, was, we need scarcely say, a severe shock. Thus he experienced great relief when, a few weeks after, on going to his office one morning, he found a letter from the wanderer, covered with sundry strange postmarks, and dated from San Miguel in the land of oranges, to to the effect that he was well and safe, in clover quite, and would soon set out for his regiment, and desiring Tom to write to him at Bermuda and tell him how all were "getting on at Thaneshurst;" adding that as he was uncertain as to his whereabouts, he had sent this letter to his office ; where Tom made the room ring with a war-whoop when he got it, and as a libation thereon "stood various grogs" to his particular chums, and then rushed home to show it to Mabel, who shed

tears of joy over it, and found in the envelope that which had not been observed by Tom—the *carte-de-visite* of a remarkably pretty girl.

"Whew!" whistled Tom; "what is our military hero up to now?"

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### "IT MAY BE FOR YEARS, AND IT MAY BE FOR EVER!"

THE autumn of the year was creeping on. Poor Mabel, instead of gathering the falling rose-leaves at Thaneshurst, and looking forward to a return to Park Lane, was now pining—yea, all but fading—in that hot and stifling London boarding-house, surrounded by endless intersections of streets, where the atmosphere and the odours were oppressive; where the open windows admitted the dust, the smell of decayed leaves and fruit the strange cries of the hideous and squalid wretches who hawked the latter, and at times the whirl of wheels and the ceaseless patter of feet. And so, when the dull muggy London days stole on, she could not help thinking more of Thaneshurst—the wooded chase, the breezy glades, with their deep, cool, shady, and leafy vistas, between which the rich gleams of golden sunlight fell, the fragrant fern, the ripple of the Ouse, the songs of the birds, the swelling Sussex downs—and of all the wealth of roses and perfume, wood and water, she had so rejoiced in once, and should never see again.

Never? She loved Tom; but London was to her both gloomy and lonely. And when Tom was absent, in her longing for something to caress, she would exclaim: "O pussy!" and snatching the Tom cat—*he* was a Tom too—from its hassock, would nurse it in her lap like the childish girl she was ten years ago. A bleak and dreary afternoon towards the end of October was drawing to a close—an afternoon made more dismal by a drizzling rain impregnated with London "blacks." A fire smouldered in the drawing-room; but the coal seemed sluggish—and no wonder, as there was a plentiful and enconomical admixture of coke among it—and Mabel felt unusually *ennuyéd*, when a tremendous rat-tat and ring came to the door, and the boarding-house by Harley

Street was startled from its sleepy propriety by the arrival of a handsome carriage, with a wigged coachman and powdered servant, and a visitor was announced "for Mrs. Seymour."

"Milly!"

"Mabel!" were the exclamations; and the two friends, careless of who saw them, were clasped in each other's arms, and showering kisses on each other's soft cheeks. Milly Allingham and her mother had come back from Wiesbaden, and, as the London season was yet distant, were *en route* for some friend's place in the country. She had got Mabel's address at Tom's office, where her appearance is still a tradition among the clerks, who had not visitors like Milly every day, and where—as they averred—her loveliness quite softened "that old beast the comptroller," and she had driven at once to Harley Street; and when they had retired for greater privacy to Mabel's room, the girls had, of course, a thousand questions to ask each other. Each thought the other looking beautiful as ever; but both were paler and more thoughtful in expression, especially Milly, whose sweet face was both pensive and sad. Even her attire was more than usually sombre. Milly was painfully impressed by the general character of her friend's surroundings, but had too much taste, tact, or affection to make the slightest reference to them; and to Mabel, how much more endurable the time seemed, now that she was with Milly, and laughing—yea, laughing aloud—at such small jokes in a way she had not done for months! Milly had thought at first, it would seem, that if she and Stanley had failed quite to understand each other, after such daily intercourse at Thaneshurst, a little time of separation might do them no harm; but the horrible shipwreck destroyed everything, and had plunged her in a despair which she could not conceal even from her mother. Now she was to hear from Mabel—her own dear sweet Mabel—amid mingled kisses and tears, that her dear, *dear* Stanley was alive after all; one of three—only three—rescued from such deadly peril by some fishermen of the Azores. Far apart they might know each other now, was her first thought. No, no! was her second; she knew him; but he never would know *her!*

To see Milly, to hear her voice, were as a little gleam of her

past life and its brightness to Mabel, a link between it and the present, between Harley Street and Thaneshurst; thus more than once Mabel fairly broke down, and sobbed with her face in the neck of her friend, who, not understanding the real source of all this emotion, began mentally to have some uncomfortable ideas about Tom.

"And now let us talk about Stanley," said Mabel, suddenly recovering herself.

"I have caused him great pain, I fear; but, O Mabel, if he knew how many tears I have shed for him, and how much I have repented, surely he would forgive me," replied the now humbled coquette. "I have to my own heart, though not to him, atoned for my folly, Mabel. But to think that he lives—lives after all, when I have been sorrowing for him as dead—a very widow in prayer and spirit! And you say, love, that he is at the Azores?"

"In the house of our consul at San Miguel, a wealthy wine-merchant. But here is his letter to Tom, who went on like a madcap when he got it," said Mabel, unlocking a drawer and handing to Milly the letter, which she impulsively kissed ere she unfolded it and read.

It was all about the *charms* of the villa (what were they?) in which he lived: the old-fashioned simplicity and *bonhomie* of the people; the scenery, the flowers, and the orange-groves; the extinct craters and precipitous mountains, to which he was often taken (by whom?); the plantations of oranges, lemons, figs, and bananas; the lovely twilight evenings (did he enjoy them alone? or with a senhora, in a short but amply flounced skirt, with taper ankles, and black eyes that flashed through the folds of her mantilla?—there was no end to all that jealousy now began to suggest). Then ever and anon the horrors of the wreck were referred to; but there was no reference to *her*. One thing consoled her—his evident anxiety to be off to his regiment at Bermuda. Even in this there was a pang; for in wishing this he was wishing to be further away from her.

Mabel had too much good taste to show Milly the *carte-de-visite*, which Stanley was perhaps weak enough to enclose with a purpose; for it was that of a piquante and strikingly lovely girl—too lovely for Milly to have relished. And pro-

mising to call soon again, she drove away, with much to think upon. Such an angel she seemed to the lonely girl she left behind; so different—a world apart—from the old dowdies among whom she dwelt, and whose respect for her was, she felt, manifestly increased by the appearance of Milly and her equipage. Seymour was glad indeed of the visit for Mabel's sake; but his poor little wife could not return the call; and yet why the deuce not? thought Tom, till he remembered the conventionalities of society, and that Milly, dreading perhaps her mamma, had not invited her to do so.

Tom was full of joy at the double event—the visit and, more than all, the letter from his friend.

"Rowley was always such a brick!" he exclaimed; "a genuine fellow, and all there; not a bit of the snob about him; and he had been an old class-fellow at Harrow."

Other visits followed, and the arrival of Milly's carriage—though never with her mamma in it, as she could not and would not patronise undutiful girls—was a source of high excitement to the inmates of the boarding-house, causing Mabel to be an increasing object of interest. Little cared she for that; to see Milly her friend, and to talk with her of past times, was all that was cared for by Mabel, whom the other now viewed as a link between herself and Stanley. Other letters to Tom came from the latter, in which now the Senhora de Vega was frequently referred to; but they never contained a word about Milly, nor even the most distant allusion to her, though many mutual friends, and even Val Reynolds, were written of. Was this studied carelessness, or was it caused by his propinquity to that horrid—for she must be horrid—Portuguese creature? Mabel could see that as Milly read these letters her tearful eyes ran wistfully and hurriedly over the whole page, as if to catch sight of her own name; but it was never mentioned, till at last Mabel ceased to pain her by showing them.

Milly had been blameless at their last meeting, but felt that she over-acted her part before it; and now she pictured to herself sundry interesting groupings in that tropical isle—a handsome young English officer, ailing, shipwrecked, and what not; guitars and castanets, short flounces and clocked stockings, starry evenings, and so forth. He knew nothing

and could know nothing of the storm of grief and repentance that even after the lapse of many weeks swelled up in the heart of her he had quitted so abruptly; or that, had she known *where* he was, she would have written to him, explaining all, but for those restraints of habit and education which now must rule even the most impulsive nature.

So she could but brood and try to bear it, with her heart full of memory's dreary echoes, after she paid her farewell visit at Harley Street. When she drove away she had an engagement, she said, but cared not to tell Mabel that it was to a garden party where Reynolds was to be, and the Master of Badenoch too; and she sped homeward by Oxford Street and the Marble Arch to Connaught Terrace, loathing the airy empty talk of the scene to which she was hastening, and full of thoughts that were new to her: joy, sorrow, and jealousy—joy that her lover lived, sorrow that he lived perhaps *not* for her, and a vague tormenting jealousy of the unknown original of the photo; for by some remissness on Mabel's part she had seen it at last, and was compelled to admit to herself how beautiful it was.

"We are parted now," she murmured sadly:

"'It may be for years, and it may be *for ever!*'

And this foreign girl—if he should love her, if he should marry her, still I shall say, God bless him and her too! She may make him happy; but she can never be to him what I have been. He will never love her as I know he loved me; and I had grown to love him as I did not deem myself capable of loving any man; and, ah, but the wrench now is keen and intense indeed!"

And so she pondered and surmised, and talked to herself, as the carriage rolled through the giddy whirl of Oxford Street. He was *not* drowned, thank God! Oh what misery she had endured at Wiesbaden, and how from association of ideas she would loathe that place with its gay Kursaal and steamy Kochbrunnen! She knew and valued Stanley's worth and his honest love now, and in memory his tender and loving eyes and voice came keenly and vividly back again. But he was gone; a vast sea rolled between them now, and a vaster would roll in the time to come. He had

left her in error and anger, and might learn, in revenge, in despite of her and of himself, to love another, perhaps this foreign creature.

And so as the dull days—dull to her amid London life—stole on, the girl's love gained force and depth by separation and the vague fears it led to. Perhaps he might relent and write to her; and gladly would she have written to him; but pride, delicacy, and the restraints of training already referred to, forbade her doing so.

And so loving, so maudlin—which you will—had Milly become, that she marvelled *who* had bought Stanley's two horses at Tattersall's, and longed to persuade mamma, who was in her secret now, to purchase them back, that she might have them to pet and to ride. How blind she had been! was ever the girl's thought; why did she not sooner learn the true state of her heart towards Rowland Stanley? She had been dreaming, floating on the current of pleasure, while the great golden charm of her life was within the grasp of her pretty hand, and she had let it pass apparently uncared for.

And Stanley's feelings for her! What were they? She asked herself this with a species of terror.

Even before Milly left town on her country visit, honest and kind-hearted Tom Seymour, duly instructed by Mabel, had written a full, true, and particular account of the whole affair of the camellia—that badge of love or conquest on which so much hinged—and how it came to be worn by Valentine Reynolds; but Rowland never received his letter until the regiment was pretty close on the eve of leaving Bermuda for another station.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### IN THE TWILIGHT.

WE left Stanley some chapters back, we have said, face to face with a young lady, who was regarding him with an expression of surprise that rapidly changed to one of genuine commiseration when Pedro del Gada, who stood hat in hand before her, told who the stranger was and how he came to be

there. Nathless his sodden attire and dejected appearance, she saw at a glance that Stanley was a gentleman, and that he was an Englishman interested her.

She bowed to Stanley, and said in very tolerable English, "You are welcome, sir, and we shall do the best we can for you, under your misfortunes. Unfortunately, the Senhor de Vega is absent at present, and will be for some days certainly. The vice-consul is very ill; but till the senhor returns you can make this your home, unless you prefer the *posada* at Ribiera Grande."

Of course Stanley did not prefer the *posada;* besides, he had no money. He thanked the senhora in very good fashion; and while mentally wondering how so good English came to be spoken in such an out-of-the-way place, and thankful to hear it, as he knew not a word of Portuguese, he followed his hostess indoors, while Pedro del Gada took charge of his companions. She led him directly into the *comedoro* or dining-room of the mansion, aware that he stood in need of immediate refreshment, and by a handbell summoned attendance and issued the necessary orders; and pointing with her long fan—which she was never without—to a sofa, said: "Do be seated, sir; you look weary and pale."

And Stanley, when draining a bumper of iced wine-and-water, presented to him on a silver salver by a mulatto servant in a kind of livery, had an opportunity, while his hostess was issuing some orders to her *muguer de gobierno* or housekeeper, of observing how handsome she was. She seemed to be in her twentieth, perhaps twenty-first, year, and her loveliness, which was undoubted, came of her mixed race—Portuguese, Flemish, and Irish blood; for, as Stanley afterwards learned, her mother came from the Emerald Isle, and hence her good English. She was fair and slender. Her hair, without excepting even that of Milly Allingham, was the most beautiful Stanley had ever seen; a golden brown, it shone out everywhere, fine, silky, and rippling. This came with her Flemish blood; her deep-gray eyes, that looked at times dark blue, were Irish decidedly; while their black lashes and eyebrows, with her slightly aquiline nose, were quite Portuguese, though her complexion was brilliantly fair.

But of all this more anon. It was evening now; and lovely though her face, it did not mingle with the dreams of Stanley when, after the luxury of a bath and receiving some refreshment, he retired to the softest of beds, and, after all he had undergone since the ship struck, sank into a deep and refreshing slumber.

When he awoke late next morning, and saw standing by his bedside the mulatto valet, Gil Perez, with a dry suit of such clothes as the Portuguese wear in the Azores, he could not at first recall where he was or what had happened to him; and the horrors so recently undergone on the piece of drifting wreck seemed to be all some horrible dream, while the present seemed to be a dream too. He dressed himself, and, remembering the charming face of last night, made the most of his toilet, and descended to coffee and fruit in the dining-room. Though the polished oak floor of this apartment was uncarpeted, his steps were unheard by his young hostess, whom he caught in the act of attitudinising before a large mirror. That she was somewhat of a coquette was evident; she had put a bouquet of fresh roses in the corsage of her dress, a single rose she had placed in her hair. Her bright face frankly and freely admired her own loveliness, and she was smiling with girlish pride at it.

Suddenly she detected Stanley's figure beyond her own in the depth of the mirror, and turning bade him good-morning, with one of the brightest smiles in the world, hoped he had reposed well, was quite recovered, and so forth, and finally gave him a rose from her bosom. Even at that moment, this little action made his memory flash back to *that* night at Brighton. And now, while Gil Perez attended on them, they breakfasted together, with a lady who seemed to be a species of friend, duenna, or companion, Stanley knew not which, but she was a very plain, almost ugly, Portuguese matron of mature years, who, luckily perhaps, all eventualities considered, knew not one word of English, and thanked Heaven, no doubt, that she did not, being the language of infidel *heregos*.

And now Stanley had to relate in detail about the catastrophe at the reef—the destruction of the ship; he had also to tell her who he was and whither he had been going;

and would yet have to go the moment he could confer with the senhor consul; all of which gave him an interest in the eyes of the lady, who listened to him with pleasure, for Stanley had undoubtedly that which Milly had greatly admired in him—the musical inflections of a rich and melodious voice. Had *she* but listened to it, how much might have been spared them both!

And now, while conversing together thus, with only a little white-marble table on a gilt pedestal between them, he could observe that in the expression of the Senhora de Vega's sweet face and in her manner (which was full of pretty little foreign trickeries) there was almost the wild *abandon* of a merry happy child, an innocent gaiety that was very winning. Her hands were small and beautiful, and she almost invariably had them gloved.

Breakfast over, the ladies assumed their veils and fans, and a walk through the gardens and orangeries was proposed; and during that most agreeable promenade Stanley discovered that like other senhoras his hostess had eyes and knew how to use them, and that she also knew right well how to flirt with and handle her fan.

The conversation was maintained by them alone, Senhora Pia, the duenna, if duenna she was, seldom speaking. To Stanley's eye she seemed "a peculiar party." Her face was a mass of minute wrinkles, but her eyes were dark and piercing. Her black hair was coarse and wiry, a veritable *tête à la* Medusa, over which she wore a black-lace veil that depended from a tortoiseshell comb. Once she addressed Stanley that morning. It was just before they left the dining-room. She pointed to the half-length portrait of a rather sour-visaged-looking man, attired in a white linen coat and broad-brimmed hat, having a grisly beard and fierce coarse nose, while saying with a smile of peculiar and, as Stanley thought, malevolent import: "El Senhor de Vega!"

"Oh, ah, indeed;" and passing with the lady, who of course he concluded must be that gentleman's daughter or niece, troubled himself no more on the subject, as he had not yet sufficient interest in her, but the time was coming with a rapidity that astonished him; yet our shipwrecked Ulysses had considerable soreness of heart and doubt of the sex

after what he had been subjected to in Piccadilly-super-Mare.

The day passed away with wonderful rapidity, and to Stanley would have been without alloy, save for the continual presence of that old wrinkled Portuguese Gorgon, the companion, who seldom or never left the side of the senhora. On reflection, it *did* seem odd to Stanley, the manner in which he found himself installed there, in that luxurious yet sequestered mansion, in the land of wine and oranges, the sole companion (so far as talking went) of a young and lovely woman, of whose existence but a day before he had been ignorant. But the Portuguese, even at home, are more free in manner than their sulky Spanish neighbours, and the colonists of the Azores, being of a very mixed race, are still more so, and have more openness, candour, and general *bonhomie* of reputation.

The female character of the Portuguese is usually retired domestic, and most amiable, and no women as a general rule are less studious of enhancing their attractions by artificial means; but the Senhora Maria de Vega left nothing undone in the study of dress to add to her own great beauty, while certainly her playful and winning manner was not the result of her Portuguese blood alone.

Music, singing, the piano, cards, and backgammon filled up the evening, and Stanley began to feel himself quite at home—*l'ami du maison*. The cooking partook more of the English than the Portuguese character, so there was luckily no garlic in anything; and luncheon and dinner were always followed by a dessert of the richest fruit, fresh from the adjoining garden or orchard, with wine fit for the gods. Stanley's lines were evidently cast in pleasant places. How long would this sort of thing last? for in his cool white-linen costume and broad straw sombrero he seemed transformed into a West-India planter.

Stanley was certainly "a species of novelty in *her* social experience," and Maria de Vega soon learned to like his society, to say the least of it. As an Englishman her Irish blood warmed to him; as a half-countryman her sympathies were enlisted in consequence of his circumstances—being so friendless, alone, and shipwrecked in a foreign land; he was

a soldier, a gentleman, and more than all a very "taking" young fellow, who could, like the Moor, tell her of "the dangers he had dared;" but whether she might "love him" therefore is yet to be seen. Any way, Captain Rowland Stanley of her Majesty's gallant —th Foot, was in the best of clover at present.

The twilight was deepening when he hung over her at the piano, listening to a pretty little Portuguese lyric, in which an old woman lamented the loss of her charms, while Senhora Pia sat at some distance from them. When the song ceased, and while her small hands still idled over the keys, Maria de Vega threw back her pretty head, and turning her half-closed eyes on Stanley, said with an air of inexpressible coquetry, "I would that I were beautiful, as this *antiquada* says she was."

"By Jove she's another Milly!" thought Stanley. "Why?" he asked.

"Why, Senhor?"

"I mean, why a wish so unnecessary?"

"I wish to be beautitul in the eyes of those I love, and of those who love me."

"You know that you are beautiful."

"In your eyes?" she asked in a low tone.

"Yes."

"Oh, then you *love* me?"

Here was an awful deduction. "No necessity to 'lead up' here, or wait for a cue," thought Stanley; "with her fan and her eyes, my Azorean friend—is there such a word?—is quite up to the mark."

"Who could look into your face and fail to love you?" he asked.

"Fie-pho, Senhor Capitano! We are already talking of love and of lovers, you and I!"

"And why not?"

"Already!"

"It is so natural when with—with——"

"What?"

"One so beautiful as you. Pardon me, I do not—dare not flatter; I tell but what that mirror tells you."

The girl's eyes were simply bewildering at that moment,

and he gazed on them as he had often done on Milly's, and thought of naughty Queen Guinivere, whose tomb yet stands in Meigle, while his heart responded to the wish :

"A man had given his worldly bliss
And every other hope for this—
To waste his whole soul in one kiss
Upon these perfect lips !"

Nearer and nearer drew their faces — a lightning glance showed that the Gorgon was asleep—and the speaking eyes of the half Portuguese girl were bent on his, and ere they very well knew what they were about the lips of Stanley met hers, in a long clinging kiss, which, under all the circumstances, we don't mean to—well, to justify. Then she blushed deeply and turned her face away, when too late.

"Oh, you had loved her sitting there,
Half hidden in her loosened hair ;
Why, you had loved her for her eyes,
Their love for light of Paradise ;
Her mouth ! 'twas Egypt's mouth of old,
Pushed out and pouting, full and bold ;"

so, all things considered, we defy Stanley to have done anything else than he did.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### THE ISLAND OF CALYPSO.

THERE had been a time, when Stanley, as the lover of Milly Allingham would not have kissed the Peri Banou, had she come before him as his new friend did ; but that time was gone now, and he felt that there was a species of *vendetta* between them. She had made him a kind of happy-go-lucky fellow—one rather disposed to enjoy the present supremely, without looking too closely into the possible future.

After that little affair in the twilight, while the unconscious Madre Pia was in the land of Nod, it may be supposed that the friendship of Stanley and his hostess ripened and cemented fast. But her bearing was to him a puzzle and an enigma, to which he had not yet the clue.

The Senhor de Vega's circle of friends was a very small one. There came at times her confessor, the Padre Jaao de Barros (a lineal descendant of that great Portuguese his-

torian), and one or two planters' wives in the vicinity. Yet the only place she visited was a convent of Poor Clares in Ribiera Grande, but the sisters saw little of her now ; and as for afternoon teas, and gatherings on the croquet-lawn, they were as little known in the Azores as in Afghanistan. Her life was certainly a dull and monotonous one ; but she never seemed afflicted by low spirits. Her presence made a fairy palace of the villa ; and yet, poor thing, her world was a narrow one.

Madre Pia still slept on. The moon had risen—the full bright moon of those happy isles—and all the trees and shrubbery seemed to stand amid the shining dewy grass as if standing amid water or silvery mist, when these two stepped from the drawing-room into the verandah.

"May I, senhora—may I love you, then, Maria?"

"You may be my friend—my friend, but—nothing more."

This reply somewhat piqued him ; and he entered a protest against all platonism, especially in the present instance. Stanley could not help making himself agreeable to any woman ; but somehow he had suddenly dropped into a semi-love-making, or demi-flirting, with the senhora, which, when once begun, it is impossible to abandon. He found himself speaking of love to her ; and yet after all the past, how desperately *commonplace* it sounded! He could scarcely have told what he meant by "going in" for this sort of thing. Neither marriage nor settling in the Azores was in his mind ; but the girl was attractive, and so evidently pleased with him that it was impossible not to humour her. Amid the soreness of his heart some tenderness for Milly lingered ; still he drifted into a more than maudlin philander with this half-Portuguese girl, only meaning to do what he had never done before—fill up the time till he could somehow get away to Bermuda. It was very bad of Stanley, we suppose ; but it seemed to be all naughty Milly's doing : and rapidly our hero found that this kind of intercourse with a girl like Maria de Vega was playing with edged tools, especially as day followed day, and when evening came the Senhora Pia went off to sleep as regularly as the sunset. He became rather hopelessly entangled.

Sometimes it did seem to Stanley that he was violating

*les convenances* by residing at the villa with so young a hostess; but she had pressed him to stay. The senhor consul was long in coming from Angra: he could get no money till he came; so what was he to do? It was pleasant to think that this handsome girl admired and loved him; so he gave himself up to the intoxication of the time or the fancy—a time that could not last. And now, when the unbidden thoughts of Milly came, they were those of bitterness rather than regret. "Milly—bah!" he would mutter; "I was the plaything, the shuttlecock of a selfish and aimless coquette, who probably by this time has arranged her *mariage de raison*."

And while toying with the pretty hands or nestling his face among the perfumed hair of his new flame he strove to stifle all memory of the old. But Stanley soon found that Maria's love of approbation was intense; yet it had reference to that of the male sex alone. That of her own perhaps she cared very little about. And then she knew little—so very little—of the usages of "society" in Europe, that she proved sometimes an amusing, but charming, puzzle to Stanley.

Times there were however, when he could not help reflecting, "This is horrid! Here I am in free quarters, eating the best and drinking the best in the house of this old fellow, and making regular love to Maria—I, a stranger, an outsider, as unknown here as if I had dropped from the moon."

But she had him so much in her meshes, that when the second week was running on he actually began to think seriously of proposing; though, whenever he became more than usually earnest, she had a skilful way of fencing with him. "To think you have been here actually ten days with no companion but me!" she said in a low voice, as they lingered by moonlight in a shady part of the verandah.

"But you are all the world to me, and the time has been all too short for the pleasure I have had."

"In the island?" she asked coyly.

"In your society, darling."

"Ten days give plenty of time to—" she paused.

"To what?"

"Learn to love; and I do like you so much."

This was taking the initiative with a vengeance, and yet

our man of the world was more flattered than amused by it; till she added, looking mischievously over her fan:

"But the love that is developed so quickly goes out."

"How—why?"

"Because there is not a good foundation for the fire, so the flame quickly dies. I don't think I could love any one long, and imagine I am intended for a convent."

Stanley in the moonlight failed to detect the affected demureness with which she said this. "Women were intended for marriage," he urged.

"Yes; but anything is better than a loveless marriage."

"Ah, Maria, ours would not be so. But do not trifle with me thus."

"I have known you not yet two weeks," she said, laughing behind her fan.

Stanley did not like *that;* but he was fairly in for a proposal now, so said a little impetuously: "For Heaven's sake, darling, don't act the coquette. I could wait years for you!"

Years! What was he talking about? In a month or so, duly sashed and belted, he would have to report himself to the officer commanding H.M.—th Foot, or the adjutant-general would know the reason why!

"And as for marriage, dearest—" he resumed, with great tenderness.

"You must not speak of it to me."

"He comes too near who comes to be refused," thought Stanley; adding:

"What a strange girl! You surely don't mean to dispense with it? But when your father comes from Angra, senhora——"

"My father! he has been dead years ago."

"Well, your uncle, or elder brother is he?"

"What on earth are you talking about? I have no uncle, no elder brother."

"Then *who* the mischief, to use no stronger word, is the Senhor de Vega?"

"My husband."

"Your husband!" exclaimed Stanley, after a pause.

"Is it possible you don't know that I am married?" said she, fairly laughing aloud.

"It is about the last thing I should have suspected," he replied, thoroughly mortified that he had been so hoodwinked. "Bosh, they are all alike!" he added under his moustache.

He thought he had been rather fooling the girl; and here he was himself "sold" and befooled!

Married! Stanley felt like a man roused from a dream, and some not very pleasant visions of Portuguese jealousy and revenge—daggers, bravoes, and so forth—flashed upon his mind, together with the conviction that he "had been a muff again." And so it was to hide her marriage-ring she so sedulously wore her hands gloved, and had so invariably spoken of the absent consul as "the Senhor de Vega," and never as anything else.

"It is your husband's portrait I have seen in the dining-room?" asked Stanley, after a long pause, during which the lady had been actively fanning herself.

"Yes, senhor."

"How unsuitable!"

"It would never do to wait always till one found a suitable partner in marriage."

"Why?"

"Because if they had so to wait, no one would ever marry at all."

Her *aplomb* was amusing; but Stanley only smiled a grim smile, and said:

"You have treated me very ill; but I suppose I must forgive you."

"Don't, *don't*, please; I hear the Senhora Pia calling me!" urged Maria; and laughingly she tripped indoors, and left him to feel that he cut rather a ridiculous figure.

"Good heavens!" thought he; "wonders will never cease. To think that all this time, and for ever so long before, she has been the wife—the wife of that duffing old bloke, whose portrait the queer old girl showed me, as I thought at the time, with a little malevolent *empressement!* I wonder whether the wind is fair for Bermuda!"

But until the arrival of the consul he could not yet turn his back upon that island of Calypso,

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### "CHE SARA, SARA."

NEXT morning at breakfast, among the letters brought to the senhora on a silver salver by Gil Perez, Stanley could perceive that one at least was from her husband. The whole forenoon she was preoccupied, restless, and uneasy—he could see that; also, that she wandered from occupation to occupation, and writhed under the keen leering eyes of old Pia. Now she idled over the piano for a melody or two; anon she took up a book, only to toss it away with a sigh of weariness and irritation. Then she opened her portfolio, to touch up a sketch and abandon it; took her missal next and read her prayers, which also proved a failure.

What did it all mean, Stanley asked her softly, but not tenderly; for the caressing look had gone out of his handsome eyes, and the caressing tone from his very pleasant voice, so there was no chance of the strange conversation of last night being resumed, or the terms on which they had been either.

"What does it mean, senhora?"

"The Senhor de Vega is returning, and will be home to-morrow."

So the little romance was drawing to a close.

"I am so glad of that," said Stanley quietly.

She gave him a little glance of reproach and shrugged her shoulders, while he assisted himself to one of the cabanas that stood in a silver stand on a side-table, lit it, and sauntered out into the verandah to smoke it and think over matters; but there the senhora joined him, and stood for a minute fanning herself in silence by his side. Though she had thus permitted or invited Stanley to make love to her as a kind of amusement to herself, she was piqued by his marked coldness now, and his avowed anxiety to be gone.

Stanley was in some ways, perhaps, not better than other men, yet he was incapable of a dishonourable or improper hope; so now all the stories he had heard of female treachery and so forth came to memory, even while with his earnest, searching, and rather scornful eyes he gazed into those of the waggish girl who had befooled him.

She now seated herself on an iron sofa that stood in the verandah, and while still using her large fan looked upward at Stanley, waiting till he should address her. After a time he asked, "Will your husband be here to-morrow evening, or in the morning?"

"This is the third time you have asked me so, senhor," she replied rather crossly; "you seem more anxious for his return than I am; and as for the precise time thereof I don't know, and—don't care very much."

"Are you and the Senhor de Vega not happy together?"

All things considered, he deemed himself fully privileged to ask this rather peculiar question.

"Not very," she replied, without the slightest hesitation.

"I am indeed sorry to hear this, for your sake. But why?"

"The proverb says there is a skeleton in every house, so ours is no exception."

He was now bending over her again, and regarding her with a certain amount of sad interest, but nothing more, and she could read his face like a book.

"Is the senhor unkind to you?"

"Far from it."

"Jealous?"

"I have never given him cause."

Stanley laughed, and thought, "If every chance visitor makes use of his time as I have done, this is an odd assertion!"

"You see this sardonyx ring?" said she, pointing to one on her handsome hand. "It bears the motto, *Che sara, sara.*"

"'What will be, will be.'"

"Exactly. There is a language of precious stones as well as of flowers, and thus the sardonyx is emblematic of conjugal fidelity. In kindness to me the senhor is all that I can desire, yet by this ring there hangs a story that makes a gulf between him and me."

"There is something very mysterious in this."

Then in one of those bursts of confidence which she should not have had, and yet could not help having, with Stanley, she told him the story of the sardonyx ring; and it was briefly this: Maria had been born in Terceira, the largest and most central of the Azores, near the town of San Salastio, where

her father, Senhor Teromo, formerly a captain of Cazadores, though a *titulado*, and consequently nobly born, had settled as a vine grower and wine merchant, and there he had married her mother, a handsome Irish girl, named Blake. He died early; under what circumstances she was long kept in ignorance. Their estate was managed by a steward; and there the widow and her daughter lived, in a pretty villa, within view of the sea, leading a lonely and sequestered life. Before the villa lay a lovely garden, bordered by the sea. Behind it rose some of those steep and precipitous cliffs which render the coast of Terceira almost inaccessible, and down their face gurgled a cascade, whose snowy white stood out in strong relief against the greenery and dark volcanic bluffs amid which it rolled to the beach.

The Senhora Teromo, who had never ceased to mourn the loss of her husband, and steadily refused several offers of marriage, by her wealth and her natural kindness of heart was a great benefactor to all the poor around her, relieving them when in distress, and in their time of sickness attending them with pious care. All, as years passed, regarded her with love and reverence; but as Maria matured and drew near womanhood, she saw what others had long seen and known, a secret grief, that ever and anon at certain times beset her mind, though she was constitutionally grave and sad, so much so that none could ever have imagined the playful and sprightly Maria to have been her daughter.

Each year, when a certain anniversary came round, she would retire to a little wayside chapel, perched in a gloomy cleft of the precipice, beside the plashing cascade, and there remain for hours absorbed in prayer—prayer for the soul of her husband.

The latter had been a good and brave man, to whom she was tenderly attached. After he had quitted the army and settled at Terceira, their life was a uniform round of calm joy, happiness, and felicity; and after the birth of his child the Senhor Teromo would not have exchanged places with the king of Portugal and Algarve. This happiness was too great to last. Who could have foreseen the terrible event that was to blast it?

One afternoon a suspicious-looking schooner, very sharply

rigged, painted black, full of men, and without any colour flying, was seen to hover off and on, near the villa, till nightfall, when a boat, unseen by all, shot off from her side and crept inshore, intent on mischief. It was at this time, when there was a revolution in Brazil, and the emperor had fled to Europe, and an expedition, consisting of 10,000 men, was fitted out in the Azores against the Miguelites, that many predatory craft ventured out in the service of Don Pedro, or pretending to be so. The boat's crew landed near San Salastio, attacked the mansion of Teromo, destroyed his wine-presses and stores, and did incalculable mischief, and carried off a load of plunder, leaving the brave old Cazadore, who fought valiantly, single-handed, in defence of his property, dead in the arms of his shrieking and horrified wife, and so dreadfully gashed and mutilated by their pikes and cutlasses, that she never, never forgot the awful appearance of his corpse as it lay upon the threshold of their once happy home. In vain were inquiries made for the perpetrators of this and other ontrages among the isles. The pirates—if pirates they were—could never be found in any way. Hence her persistent sadness, and hence her hours of passionate prayer in the wayside chapel, as yearly the anniversary of this dreadful event came round.

But time passed on inexorably. Maria grew a blooming and lovely girl, the admiration of all who beheld her. But she was merely a dowerless damsel now, that night of outrage having all but ruined her widowed mother; and the young men who sighed for her and whose hearts quickened at her approach, who hastened to hand her holy water from the font before mass, and lingered at the porch of San Salastio to watch her depart, were all too poor to propose marriage. At last there came the rather elderly but enormously wealthy Senhor de Vega, of San Miguel, who, with all the confidence his doubloons inspired, after showering presents upon her, flattering her vanity, and leaving nothing undone to gain her affection, made her an offer of his hand; and Maria, nathless the disparity of years, being a that age when a young girl is but too apt to accept the first man who offers himself, accepted him as her husband; and they were married in the church of San Salastio, the groomsman being his elder brother, Vincente de

Vega, an officer of the Brazilian navy, a handsome but stern old man, with snow-white hair.

As they returned from church the Senhor de Vega was enchanted with the novelty of his position, the beauty of the bride he had won, the regret, envy, and admiration of the young men around them; and whilst caressing the little hand so recently won he slipped upon it a valuable ring to guard the wedding one, saying, that though she would have a thousand more pledges of his love, she must never part with that, as it was the gift of his brother Vincente. As she threw herself into the arms of her now lonely mother, to bid her adieu ere taking the steamer for her new home in San Miguel, amid her tears and kisses the blushing girl said, "Look, mamma; see the beautiful ring my dear husband—oh, is it not charming to call him so?—has given me."

The moment the eyes of the Senhora Teromo rested on the ring the colour forsook her cheeks, her lips became blanched, a wild expression came into her eyes, and pressing a hand on her heart, as if it would have burst, she exclaimed, "Santo de los Santos! the ring of my husband—the sardonyx ring—with its motto! How—how—speak, Senhor de Vega—how came it in your possession?"

To do him justice, De Vega looked very much distressed and bewildered by the exhibition of this deep and unpleasant emotion at such a time, but he said calmly, "The ring, senhora? It was the gift of my brother Vincente to me years ago.'

"The gift of your brother! Oh!" wailed the widow. "Years ago, when I was rich in means, and richer yet in the love of my dear, dear husband, our house was assailed one night by pirates, and robbed of all that could be carried off. My husband was hewn to pieces in my very arms, and robbed of every valuable he possessed; among other things, *this ring*. And now, by the Holy of Holies, I request of you—you, Vincente de Vega—to tell me how it came into *your* possession!"

The face of the Brazilian officer was now, amid its bronzing, as pale as that of his impassioned questioner. He too trembled, but remained doggedly silent. But the whole story soon came out—the mystery was explained. The leader of those fatal pirates and the man who actually met the Senhor Teromo in conflict was the identical Vincente de Vega.

"*Che sara, sara*—what will be, will be!" moaned the widow; "and now my poor child is to sleep in the bosom of him whose brother slew her father!"

"Hence, senhor, though from that hour Vincente never crossed our path again," said Maria de Vega when her little story was concluded, "from that hour there has ever been somewhat of a gulf between the senhor and myself; and the memory of my mother's anguish is for ever mingled with the memory of a marriage that should never have been; but as the ring has it, *Che sara, sara!*"

And again the coy little smile and come-kiss-me kind of glance stole into her face, as she looked upward, but in vain, at Stanley; her pretty winning ways, her tender beseeching glances only won from him a grimace now; and, sooth to say, the story she related rather added to that gentleman's anxiety to be off. It was no joke to have made such open love to the sister-in-law of a Portuguese pirate.

The senhor consul duly arrived, and heard with doubt that was unpleasant, and a stern gloom that was more so, the whole affair of Stanley's sojourn at his residence; nor did the openly-given caresses of his playful little wife smooth away the wrinkles on his brow.

"O ye gods and little fishes!" thought Stanley, as he remembered that Lady Lee likened a kiss from Sir Joseph to pressing her nose against a pane of glass; and somehow, to the senhora, her liege lord's salute was "like kissing one's aunt, and kisses should not be sown on unappreciative soil."

Decidedly the senhor consul was not handsome. His eyes were restless and shifty; his normal expression was grave and stern; his smile, when he did smile, which was remarkably seldom, was merely a sardonic grin, and then he showed all his orange-peel-coloured teeth, under a ragged and grisly moustache.

After an interview with Pedro del Gada concerning the men he had picked up (Bill and Tom had already shipped at Ribiera Grande and gone to sea), the consul resolved to lose no time in relieving his wife of her duties as hostess. Whether it was the result of a sudden excess of friendship for the shipwrecked *Ingleso*, or the result of a conference with Senhora Pia (we are inclined to conclude it was the latter), so active

was our senhor consul, that, on the very evening of the day he arrived, Stanley found himself on the deck of a ship bound for Bermuda, and watching in the declining sunset the white walls of the villa or Quinta de Vega melting into the sea, as the volcanic peaks of St. Michael lessened on the port-quarter, with night and the Atlantic before him. All his residence there seemed intangible—a dream!

On the whole, after mature reflection, Stanley felt rather humiliated than flattered by this episode of his life, and the very unpremeditated kiss that had brought it all about. Weary, tired, and disgusted though the girl might have been with her surly old consul, she could not have loved *him*. She had laughed at him, and he felt that he deserved to be laughed at. "Of all the muffs, I am the greatest," thought he. "Thank Heaven, the mess don't know, and never can know, of this affair."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### IN HARLEY STREET AGAIN.

THE first weeks of the new year were creeping on. January in London is seldom very lively, so far as the atmosphere is concerned. The muddy straw that had so long disfigured the street before Mabel's dwelling was gone now, and so was the cause thereof—to Kensal Green probably; so the house, with the black door and bronze knocker, had been shut up, and now looked more ghostly and gloomy than ever.

Christmas had come and gone. In many respects how unlike that festival at Thaneshurst! To the struggling that season brings little but bills; and Mabel, like many others, had to marvel whether the traders would content them with the little sum she could afford to give to each, adding aloud to Tom,

"If they know we are not rich, love, they know we are honest, and surely they will be gentle with us."

The fast-falling snow lay deep on the roofs, but its flakes were instantly changed to mud and slush in the streets, and Mabel used to sit watching it for hours, that were indicated by the adjacent bell of Marylebone Church tolling through the murky air; and gloomy though her surroundings were this winter—the first of her married life—she would often say to Seymour,

"O Tom, my happiness is great, yet it would be greater and more complete if papa would only forgive me—us, I mean."

"And your mamma, darling?"

"Ah, I have no hope of mamma, Tom," she replied, with her eyes full of tears; and the girl spoke more truly than she thought, for Mrs. Brooke was—save Foxley—their most unrelenting enemy.

The Government had been at its cheese-paring work, and it happened that about this time the salaries of Tom Seymour and many others in his department were most unjustly cut down when more money was required. Money soon became scarce with him, for that which may be enough for one is not always enough for *two;* and he and Mabel began to feel, what they had never felt before, a feverish restlessness for their future, a vague sense of some impending calamity. About this time, too, Tom chanced to overhear a conversation in a coffee-room, which greatly ruffled him. It was between two city clerks, who were total strangers to him.

"What is old Brooke supposed to be worth, Smith?"

"Old John Brooke with the pretty daughter?"

"Yes."

"Well, he's said to be worth nearly a million on 'Change."

"A million! I don't believe a word of it."

"Why?"

"Because his daughter is married to a fellow in Blake's office, don't you know, and they live in cheap quarters somewhere near Marylebone, and that don't look very like a million; so I believe the old fellow's tin is all a fiction."

"A fiction founded on solid fact, Smith."

"Perhaps so; but of all the money he has coined never a penny will go to his girl, for Alf Foxley tells me the old man has cut her off without even the usual shilling."

"To whom is the money to go, then?"

"Alf was very mysterious about that; though that night, at the Criterion, he was as drunk as an owl."

So such things were said, and Mabel was made the subject of gossip by people thus!

He told her of this conversation, and she made light of it, saying cheerfully and bravely, "Fear not for the future,

Tom; I have just been thinking that I shall teach music and drawing. If Milly were in town I am sure she would get me some pupils; and all who know me—at least, who knew me *once*—are aware that I have a good ear and a skilful touch, and that my drawings are considerably above the average."

Tom shook his head sorrowfully, while his heart was wrung to hear her speak thus, and he opposed the idea earnestly; but the more he did so the more full she became of her new project.

"I shall look for pupils at once, darling; it will be so nice to have money of one's own earning."

"Introductions and recommendations are necessary, Mabel," said Tom; and her heart sank immediately.

"True; even a character, I suppose; and who will recommend me? Character! What am I talking about?" she exclaimed, while her soft cheek crimsoned at her thoughts; "am I not a married woman?"

But she saw many difficulties in her way—barriers that in her total ignorance of such things she could not have anticipated, though Seymour did. To innumerable advertisements that she answered or inserted no responses came. The music-shops gave her the addresses of a few persons, but reluctantly; for though Mabel's appearance was charmingly prepossessing, she was so unused to this style of thing, that she had a painful blushing and hesitating manner that gave her all the bearing of one acting under a cloud. She was sometimes left standing in an entrance hall after timidly sending in her card till her poor heart sank within her. One lady would not have her on any terms; she was far too pretty to be a teacher, and her eldest son was home on leave from his regiment. Another offered her remuneration so wretched that it would not have kept her in gloves and boots. A third on hearing *who* she was became virtuously indignant, and rang the bell to have her shown out.

"The idea!" as she said to her first visitor, "that I should intrust any part of my darling's education to a bold bad girl who eloped from her father's house! And now she calls herself Mrs. Seymour! I don't believe a word of it, my dear; and we must warn all our friends against her."

So eventually Mabel's project for having pupils to add to their little income proved a miserable failure. Her drawings and water-colour sketches were not without considerable skill; but then she had the highest order of it to contend with in the market, and the picture-dealers to whom she offered them were supercilious and even impertinent. Her very beauty seemed to cause it sometimes.

"Is this sketch of 'Lewes Castle' a specimen of your skill?" asked a Jew shopman one day, with a decided leer in his ugly face.

"No, sir," said she gently.

"What then?"

"My want of skill, rather," she replied modestly.

"How *can* you say so, my darling!"

Then she hurriedly left the shop, and forgot to take her drawing with her. Always afoot now, and never in the carriage as of old, or attended by a valet, in her gentleness and timidity she shrank like a sensitive plant from "the rude jostling and curious gaze of the heartless crowd." Some of her works elsewhere remained in the windows of Oxford Street and New Bond Street, till flyblown and faded, after which they were half-contemptuously tossed over the counter to her as unsaleable, a drug in the market, and so forth, and she was told that she need not return again. Scores of such heart-burnings and disappointments she concealed from Tom, and also that she was often passed in the streets by old friends with the calm casual glance of one who was resolved no longer to acknowledge her. Some were seized with sudden fits of star-gazing, and others there were who, when in the carriage or on horseback, had not even the good taste to avert their stony gaze.

Mabel ceased to care about this kind of thing after a time. She had matters of more importance nearer and dearer to her heart to think about. The brave girl began even to conceive she might get some employment in telegraphy; but she had no interest, and no money wherewith to procure a teacher: and this futile project she concealed from Tom. But the hour was at hand when it was worse than vain for Mabel to hope for any employment, and she had to spend much of her time on the hard horsehair sofa of the boarding-

house, listening to the alarming experiences of more mature matrons than herself, her eyes often so weak that she could not read; she was strange, unequal in spirits, and easily tired.

A baby was coming. Now more than ever in her lonely hours did she think of the relentlessness of those at Thaneshurst. How *could* they be so cruel? And baby, when it came, would be so poor! For whom was all their wealth designed if not for it? And to the appearance of this little stranger she looked forward as the means of obtaining forgiveness for herself and Tom.

So Mabel, the girl-wife, about to become a mother soon, often looked sadly at the sunset, which, even in the softest evening of summer, is ever seen in London through a veil of smoke and vapour, and, with the vague natural fears that she might never see that season again, thought how sweetly the early buds of spring would be bursting, and the lovely white-and-pink blossom would be covering the almond trees at Thaneshurst, and of the long vista from its windows—the woody vista terminated by the rippling and shining sea. The cool breeze was there, on the grassy lawns and under the old trees; and by contrast she sickened as she thought how hot and breathless even in spring were those avenues of brick and dust, the streets of moiling, toiling, roaring London.

The girl's longing to be again at Thaneshurst, though she concealed it from Tom, amounted at times almost to a pain. Every hour he could steal or beg leave for, Tom spent with her, watching her day by day, with eyes very anxious and often aghast, trying the while to appear gay about her health, lest she might be scared; for if he was to—oh, to lose her, how deeply would his heart reproach him! and what would he have to live for then? And if it should so happen, he tormented himself with thoughts of the bright life that would pass out of his, and the lonely years that lay beyond, till he thrust the morbid ideas aside as being too terrible to contemplate. Her pretty hands were never weary of making the little things that were necessary; and she had ever and anon something new to show him when he returned—something like a doll's dress.

"O Tom darling, won't baby look pretty in this?"

And, of course, Tom agreed that "it would," and it was all arranged that if a girl, "it" was to be called "Martha, for mamma" (poor Tom's mother was never thought of, though *her* name had been more euphonious than Martha), and if a boy, Tom and, after grandpapa, Brooke.

And Mabel laughed a merry little laugh at the idea of "grandpapa Brooke."

Milly Allingham was to be the godmother, though represented by proxy, as she could make no excuse to her mamma for being in town at that time; indeed, their country engagements then were double deep; so baby should not go, after all, without a handsome sponsorial mug and spoon.

The landlady and all the inmates of the house had long since learned to doat on Mabel; she did much by her presence to enliven that somewhat gloomy dwelling. She had a hundred little ways, and was mistress of as many arts by which a place may be embellished: she had flowers blooming in the windows where none had bloomed before; she arranged all the little ornaments of the place in a better mode; and poor and jangling though the piano, she had it tuned a little; her touch upon its old keys was full of tenderness and feeling, and her clear and thrilling soprano voice, as she sang, filled all who heard her with delight. And so when, in the fulness of time, Mabel's baby came, and she and Tom thought that never was seen such a baby before, all the dwellers in the house saw with real regret that it was a poor and wasted-looking little thing, the result of its mother's sorrow and anxiety, and most unlikely to live.

Tom Seymour felt quite another and much more important personage after this event, and smiled blandly, as if he had achieved some great national feat or victory, when receiving the congratulations of his office chums, and even those of the old comptroller, to whom the arrival of babies was no longer a startling novelty now. But day by day Mabel's youngling that lay in her bosom pined, and wailed, and fretted, and even as she watched and looked at it, as only a mother can look, the deadly fear came upon her that her baby might die!

"It is only a baby," said some of those around her to each other; but that baby's loss would make the world—even with Tom—a fearful *blank to her.*

The *Times* containing the announcement of the little one's birth was unseen by Mr. Brooke; it was spirited away at Thaneshurst; so was a brief and dutiful note from Tom, informing him of the event which seemed of such vast importance to the somewhat lonely pair. Thus no letter replied, no visit, as she had fondly trusted, ever took place; and Mabel did indeed then weep such bitter tears as she had never wept before, until on the seventh day of baby's existence, and before she could have it baptised, it had a sudden fit and died in her arms.

Many more days had elapsed before the young mother could realise to the full the bitterness of her loss—that she had no longer the sweet little blossom in her bosom, and that she could toy with its tiny velvet feet and fingers no more. And thus the hope of so many past weeks had vanished, and the little frocks and shirts—funny, dear, delightful garments, triumphs of ingenuity, economy, and affection—which her pretty hands had so hopefully made, and in the manufacture of which even the sourest of spinsters had cheerfully assisted her, had all been made in vain. They were never, never to be worn by the poor little waxen doll that she last saw, before it was borne away from her, looking so stiff and cold and white, but withal looking like what it was—an angel!

The light had faded out of her life, and she never knew how much her affectionate heart loved her little child till she lost it. Her baby was dead—her baby and Tom's; a blighted life; the blossom had died in the budding. Oh, had papa and mamma seen it, she thought, they must have forgiven her and Tom the dreadful iniquity of getting married. And day by day she lay weeping in bed, with the shadow of a great grief over her, and with the tiny dresses around her, and the white-lace berceaunette—Milly's gift—the prettiest to be got in London, empty now, by her side; and a shadowy babe seemed to lie therein. Its presence seemed to hang about the shrine.

It was long before Mabel was comforted; but nothing—not even grief—lasts for ever.

Hearts break, or "brokenly live on;" men, women, and little children die; but the tide of life flows evenly and for ever!

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### MR. BROOKE'S WILL.

SPRING was past, and the sweet season of summer was drawing on at Thaneshurst, as elsewhere all over smiling England. The orchard-houses were filling with glowing peaches, golden apricots, and the fresh green leaves and tendrils of the vast strawberry-beds were laid on layers of yellow straw; the wood-pigeons cooed from their nests in the plantations beside the chalk-pits ; and, as Mr. Diggory Digweed, the superintendent of all these, averred, there had never been such a season for fruit and flowers. But the real Flower of Thaneshurst was pining in dusty London.

The casual remarks on the subject of Mr. Brooke's will which Tom Seymour had overheard in the City one day were, we are sorry to say, not without foundation. We have said that there were times when Mr. Brooke felt disposed to alter his will, and that Foxley did not despair of the old gentleman, in some of his transports of anger, doing so in *his* favour. Instead of making an alteration he destroyed it, which made matters worse for the amiable cousin.

It had been Mr. Brooke's intention when Mabel married to have settled upon her at first such an income as would preclude all chance of his pet missing a single luxury to which, since childhood, she had been accustomed. *Now* she had lost all. And Mrs. Brooke, in her fear that Seymour, if aught happened to her husband, should benefit by his wealth, gave him rest neither night nor day until another will was prepared, to suit her views and her unnatural spirit of vengeance.

Several excellent and brilliant matches made about this time by the daughters of friends—among others, Fanny Conyers became the Hon. Mrs. Comyn, wife of the Master of Badenoch—had served to rouse Mrs. Brooke to fresh rage against Seymour and her daughter.

Luncheon was over, and Mr. Brooke was seated on a rustic sofa, lost in thought, under a great plum-tree near the house —his favourite spot—when he beckoned to him, from the drawing-room bay window, Mrs. Brooke and Alf, who thought he had been unusually abstracted all the morning.

"I've read in a book, Martha dear," said he, "that 'the age has grown commercial, and that the more money a man has the more he expects with his wife.' But I have taken sure means now to prevent that Mr. Thomas Seymour having a penny of mine," he added, with a kind of fierce snorting sigh.

"Glad to hear you say so, John; and now for the will—the will! Where is it?"

"Which you have worried me night and day to make. It is here," said he, putting a hand in his breast-pocket.

Had she no pity, no regret, no compunction, this mother—a mother but in name? We fear not; for her eyes sparkled balefully, and there came an indescribable twinkle into the green-gooseberry eyes of Alf Foxley.

"I have done it at last, Alf," said the old gentleman, looking up with a kind of weary expression.

"What, sir?" his nephew asked, with an air of great unconsciousness.

"You shall hear, you shall hear," replied Mr. Brooke, as he drew forth a folded parchment, in his own handwriting, five pages in extent, which proved to be his will, carefully prepared in strict legal form, leaving, with the exception of a few bequests and Mrs. Brooke's portion, the whole of his property of every description without reserve to his well-beloved nephew Alfred Brooke Foxley. There was no more memory of Mabel in it than if she had never existed.

"O sir, how good of you, how generous! What can I say to express my gratitude?" exclaimed Foxley, trembling with joy.

"You are my only sister's only son, Alf," said the old gentleman in a broken voice, as he slid back into his pocket the will (which Alf could see was neither signed nor witnessed), "and alone deserve, by your uniform attention to your aunt and me—and, more than all, by your good and moral conduct—to benefit by the goods that God has given me."

"But Mabel, sir!" urged Foxley; for even his own heart felt that there was something cruel and shameless in this transaction.

"Not a word, nephew, not a word of *her!*" said Mr. Brooke, waving his hand and looking—or rather trying to look—stern. "As she has made her bed, so must she lie on

it. But leave me now, both of you, please; for I feel very, very tired."

To do him justice, perhaps poor Mr. Brooke was, in his inner heart, inclined to make the "bed" referred to as soft and cosy as possible for his once darling; but though he deemed her ensnared and deluded, he dared do nothing; for, pliant and yielding in the hands of his wife and nephew (who brought from time to time terrible tales and hints of Seymour's shortcomings and iniquities), he had no more mind of his own than a child. And as he sat there, sunk in thought, and looked down the sunny garden-walk, where the bush-roses bloomed in fragrant masses, and the vista was terminated by a marble fountain, where the gold-fish *she* was wont to feed were darting under the white leaves of the water-lilies, and a bronze Triton spouted a jet of water skyward from a conch, he saw in memory a bright-haired happy little girl, with dimpled cheeks and beaming eyes, alternately chasing the butterflies or rushing under the plum-tree to clamber up to papa's breast, and who laughed and shouted to the rooks that cawed in the high elms of the older Thaneshurst; and the old man's heart seemed to fill with tears of mingled rage and sorrow, while he clutched, yea, crushed, the fatal document that lay in his pocket.

"Relent!" he muttered. "No, no, Martha, there must be no relenting now!"

And this discarded and disinherited one was the daughter for whom he had hoarded up wealth, for whom his wife had schemed and striven to mesh or birdlime a title, even though borne by a fool. How happy they had been till he brought —as Martha truly said—the viper Seymour into their dove's nest, the son of the old friend and chum he once loved so well, but whose memory in some of his occasional gusts of anger he felt inclined to execrate, nay, did so, loudly and deeply!

Times there were, when he was left alone and uninfluenced by Mrs. Brooke, when he felt inclined to take a more lenient view of the culprits. With all his wealth accumulating about him, it did seem a monstrous thing the severity of this punishment, that Mabel should be cast forth on the cold bleak world; for, by contrast, what was Tom's now-reduced salary to all she had enjoyed but beggary?

"Tom must love her, Martha," he would sometimes urge.

"Do not speak, John, of the cunning selfish rogue who, aided by *your* folly, stole our daughter and brought disgrace on Thaneshurst," would be the stern response of Mrs. Brooke, who had always been in the worst of humours since "the *fiasco*," that most unforgivable event, and about this time was more cross than usual, though gratified by the accomplishment of the will; for now she had a slight attack of hay-fever or summer influenza, and was imbibing numerous saline draughts, prescribed for her by Dr. Clavicle. "You surely don't mean to grow weak-hearted now!" she exclaimed scornfully.

"Not at all, Martha dear, not at all. She deserves to drink to the very dregs the bitter cup of misfortune," said he, draining a goblet of iced champagne, brought him at that juncture by Mr. Mulbery, and this, perhaps, suggesting the simile. But these were all wild words, and do what he could, the would-be-cruel old man could not banish Mabel from his thoughts; and times there were when he but too evidently yearned for her; and these symptoms—with a knowledge that the will was as yet *unsigned*—filled Alfred Foxley with the most genuine alarm for his own interests.

The profits of Mr. Brooke's business—though conducted now by other hands—were yearly increasing, His money, well and carefully invested, made more money, in spite of himself; but a consciousness of this, and the care with which, by mere force of habit, he still, as of old, read the money article in the *Times*, and studied the state of things on 'Change, brought him no pleasure now.

For whom was all this done?—Alf, not her. The latter's prospects were sometimes in greater peril than that amiable and moral young man wotted of. The will, though written, and most satisfactory so far as *he* was concerned, was not signed, and perhaps would only be so in some moment of weakness or anger; and if the old gentleman were to die without doing so—and Alf's blood ran cold at the idea—Tom Seymour, in virtue of his wife, would become lord of Thaneshurst, the house in Park Lane, the money in the Funds, and all the rest of it. The bare thought of such an idea was every way utterly intolerable, and Alf felt that something—he knew not what

—must be done to place himself and his future, which were one and the same thing, beyond the reach of perilous contingencies.

He knew that, save Mabel and himself, his uncle Brooke did not possess a relation in the world; and could he but remove somehow, or utterly disgrace her and her husband—"Ha, ha! her husband, curse him!"—all the old man's money should surely come to him, if the former did not live obnoxiously long enough to become weak, forgiving, "and all that sort of thing."

And Mabel's birthday and Mrs. Brooke's own and "dear old papa's," as she always called it, came and passed unheeded now at Thaneshurst. There were no more kisses, caresses, and congratulations; no pretty slippers of her working for him, and for her no rings or bracelets or other graceful presents to select for a morning surprise, and to be slipped under her pillow at night; and all because of that Tom Seymour.

But none at Thaneshurst village or in the parish generally spoke hardly of Mabel; for as the Rev. Alban Butterley and Dr. Clavicle found, all—the poor especially—missed her, for many kindly, many graceful, and many monetary reasons.

Having far exceeded his allowance, Alfred Foxley was at low-water now; even what he could pick up at cards and billiards failed as a source of income. He had been sometimes in town; and dinners to Aimée and her friends of the *corps de ballet*, at the Star and Garter, down the river at the Trafalgar, and quiet little lunches in cosy rooms overlooking the Green at Kew, always ending somehow with gold "Mizpah," or diamond rings, or "A. E. I." lockets, or such trinkets, had sorely impaired his finances; and more than once he had been mean enough or desperate enough to permit that fair *danseuse* to "set him on his pins," as he phrased it, by clearing off his "little bills and renewed acceptances."

This on the one hand, on the other was the unsigned will, only so much waste paper as yet; and Mr. Brooke, Foxley could see, since the advent of Mabel's affair, had failed very much, and might at any moment relent in her favour. He, Foxley, knew nothing of late events at Harley Street, save that a baby had been born and was dead; two facts the concealment of which from Mr. Brooke, lest they might have kindled

a dangerous sympathy in the old man's heart, required a vast amount of cunning and care ; and now he thought it not improbable that, for all they knew at Thaneshurst, the mother herself might be dead or dying, in which case, will or no will, he, Alf, would come in for all. He resolved that the first time he was in town he would "look up Seymour" at his office ; and, as opportunity to work evil is ever the devil's game, a most unhappy effect upon Tom's future was the result of that most fatal visit, which came thus to pass.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE DEVIL'S GAME.

"SIR, I like a good hater," said Doctor Johnson.

Alf Foxley was quite up to the mark as a "hater," yet we doubt if he would have been liked by the bluff and burly lexicographer, who used to smoke his long clay pipe o' nights at the Cheshire Cheese off Fleet Street.

Alf had now become constitutionally gregarious. When not loafing about Thaneshurst and making love, or what he called such, to Polly Plum, his life was one of rambling from place to place and of morbid excitement, knowing to a penny the value of money, but not the necessity for work. He associated with a class to his industrious old uncle unknown—quasi-military, half-sporting, and wholly raffish—fellows who dressed well and looked well, yet were only hoverers on the frontiers of decent society. Alf, though his "simple old nunky," as he called him, knew nothing about it, had "gone on the turf," and become the daily associate of turfites and frequenters of the betting-ring ; and there were times when he was flying over all England to "meetings," where he "made up" books, which cost him more thought and care than even his *Elements of Euclid* did at Rugby. One of these missions had brought him to London ; and quitting his hotel on his errand of discovery, he threw himself into a hansom, and sought Tom Seymour's office, in a densely crowded locale eastward of St. Paul's.

Tom was quite alone, and hard at work on some piece of business, that he might get away to give Mabel a walk in the Regent's Park ; and on looking up from his desk could scarcely believe his eyes when he found himself confronted by the now

somewhat rakish-looking Alf Foxley. Alf had in his hand a riding-whip. "Nothing like a riding-whip," says the author of *Archie Lovel*, "for giving one the air of a man of means."

"What! you, Alf—*you!*" he exclaimed, with unfeigned astonishment, yet nevertheless holding out his hand; for his visitor was the near kinsman of his wife, and it just shot across Tom's mind that he might have come on a mission of peace and good-will at last. Yet the cold slimy grasp of this visitor's hand was as destitute of human sympathy or human warmth as the tail of a fish fresh out of the water. The man Foxley hated most on earth now stood before him. Seymour knew that well; yet when he came thus to his office, smiling and with an air of kindness, doubtless to ask after Mabel and *her* interests, there was nothing left for Tom but to take his hand, and exchange with him the usual hollow and unmeaning commonplaces of polite society.

"How are all at Thaneshurst?" he asked.

"Well, when I was there last."

"You saw about poor baby in the papers, Alf?"

"Of course."

"A dear little pet," said Tom, with a sigh.

"Well, didn't think that this, the first, I suppose, of your 'hostages to Fortune,' would be a *big* pet," was the chaffing response of the unsympathetic Foxley.

"Mabel had more than half a hope that when it died her parents would come to her."

"Ah, indeed!"

"You'll go and visit her, won't you?"

"Well—ah—I had rather not, Seymour."

"Why?" asked Tom.

"Her parents are implacable."

"Still?"

"Still; her father especially."

"Poor girl!" sighed Tom; "she would so like to see a familiar face, and does so love her kindred. By nature she is so affectionate."

"She never cared a dump for *my* face; and as far as kinship went, she loved me little enough," rejoined Foxley, with a bitterness of tone that brought the colour into Tom's pleasant but anxious face. "Anyway, I am glad to see you," he added,

Again they shook hands, for Seymour was warm and impulsive; and strange to say, as they did so there crept into his heart a vague, an indefinable and indescribable fear that Foxley was destined to work him some evil; but how, or what it might be, he could not conceive. He only knew that his visitor hated him; and though he was perfectly aware of his rivalry, he could never have thought that for weeks and months past he had sought to turn the heart of Mr. Brooke more and more against him by insinuations to the effect that he gambled and betted, drank more than was good for him, and in many more ways than one made but a very indifferent husband for Mabel.

"Ah, well," he asked, after a little awkward pause, "and how do you find the love-in-a-cottage, with roses and jasmine, earwigs and snails, a Sunday-school girl to cook your mutton, and all that sort of thing, get on, Seymour?"

"We don't live in a cottage," replied Tom drily.

"Ah, where *do* you live?"

"In Harley Street" (as if he didn't know)—"at least in a street off it," replied Tom, thinking in his heart, "If this fellow has not come on a friendly errand, why has he come here at all?"

He had never spoken "anent" (as the Scotch say) his marriage to any one; but Foxley was Mabel's cousin; so he said, after another pause, "It was hard of Mr. and Mrs. Brooke to be so bitterly opposed to our marriage."

"Not at all," was the blunt response. "They only thought and acted as other people of the world would have done in opposing such an affair."

"People of the world?"

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose so," said Tom, with a sigh; "but I am so sorry for my Mabel."

"Ah, you should have thought of all that before," replied Foxley, who had vaulted on to a vacant office-stool, and sat there swinging his legs to and fro, with his hat—he had never removed it—a little on one side, and a leer of malevolence in his eyes—a leer which he strove in vain to conceal as he continued: "And so poor Mabel, I suppose, has now to darn socks, make shirts and pies, and all that sort of thing?"

"We have not much to live upon, Alf, old fellow; but then,

you see, we love each other so much that we can't help being happy."

In his full consciousness of that, Tom forgot for the moment that this sneering visitor had been—nay was still—his black and bitter-hearted rival, without one iota of genuine love for Mabel.

"Well, but it can only be a life of genteel—beggary after all," suggested the amiable cousin.

"Compared with all Mabel has been accustomed to, yes. You know, Alf, my salary, like that of some others, was cruelly reduced."

"It was never very much at any time, I suppose. Does Mabel know that her pad was sent to Tattersall's, and that everything has been done to obliterate all memory of her at *home?*"

Seymour looked at the bitter speaker wistfully, yet with anger growing in his heart—anger which he strove to stifle.

"She does not know, and I trust never will," he replied quietly.

Foxley, though inspired with the love of gold—the love in which no man surpasseth a Scotch lawyer or a Polish Jew—was totally destitute of industry; and now, when he looked around him at the ledgers and dockets, dockets and ledgers, the desks, brass rails, tin boxes and other "properties" of the office in which he sat,

"O Lord!" thought he; "to one of my Bohemian tastes and ways, what a life this would be day by day—this squirrel-like work, the yearly red-tape routine of a public office, or any office indeed!—And so you find Captain Stanley wasn't drowned after all?" he said aloud.

"Poor dear Rowland—no, thank God!" replied Tom, brightening up.

"Some men are born not to be, you know. How spoony he was on that girl Milly Allingham! But as she threw him over, it is all off now, of course."

"I cannot say; there was some fatal misconception between them. This I am endeavouring to clear up; so I hope it will all—all—"

"Come right in the glazing, as the artist-fellows say."

"Exactly."

"I suppose you can't give a fellow a b.-and-s. here?"

"No; such would be against the rules and orders."

"Blow the rules and orders, say I! Had a late night of it with Larkspur, Craven, and some others. Won ninety sovs., however." (Sufficient, he thought, to afford some peace-offering to the cormorant Aimée, who had grown somewhat restive of late.) "Then is smoking allowed here by your old man?"

"The comptroller?"

"Yes."

"No; better not."

"Oh, bother! we'll have a weed together, for all that," said Alf; and diving into the pocket of a light-gray overcoat, he drew therefrom an elegant sealskin cigar-case, the last gift of the fair Aimée, and Tom accepted therefrom a havanna. But ere he could light it, a bell rang, and something, apparently rather unintelligible, was bellowed or mumbled down a pipe.

"Excuse me, Alf, for half a minute. I have to send this money to the Inland Revenue Office," said Tom, taking a bundle of notes from a drawer.

"A good sum apparently."

"Twenty thousand pounds."

"By Jove, I wish they were mine! A lot of fun could be got out of that money."

Again the voice mumbled down the pipe; and while Tom replied, and put his ear thereto leisurely, with averted face, there flashed like lightning on the mind of Foxley the unsigned will and the chance for ruining the character of Seymour, for Brooke's money would never be left to the wife of *a felon*. With nervously quick but stealthy hand he abstracted a handful of the notes and thrust them into the ample pocket of his overcoat, his heart palpitating painfully as he committed the dangerous and dastardly outrage,—not that he wanted the money, or would dare to use the notes, the numbers of which were no doubt taken, but thinking only that their loss would *inculpate* Tom. It flashed upon his mind too, that if the latter counted the notes again and missed those just taken, Foxley would restore them as if they had been taken for a jest.

Unluckily for himself, Tom did *not* count them, having

reckoned the bundle a short time before. So he carefully put the whole into a large envelope, which he sealed with the office seal, addressed, and then gave it to a junior clerk named Blake; and a few minutes after the latter had gone Foxley took his leave, promising to "look him up" the first time he passed that way. On gaining the street, Alf's upper lip drew up from his teeth as he gave a smile like the snarl of an angry bull-dog.

"I have done for him!" thought he; "settled *his* business rather, I think; and, my pretty Mabel's spouse, I shall turn my back on you, on the great city and all my creditors, till I see what comes of *this*."

His first idea was to destroy the notes, so that their identity might be lost for ever. His second—for he had not the heart to put so much good cash quite out of existence—was to keep them; but for what purpose he scarcely knew. He placed them carefully in the breast-pocket of his light-coloured dust-coat; and with all the emotions of one who had—as he had done—committed a great crime, he plunged into a hansom, and sought to place as much distance as he might between himself and Tom Seymour's office.

Tom was looking at his watch. The underground train to Portland Road would whisk him westward in time to keep his promise to Mabel, and already—for though wedded they were lovers still—he seemed to hear her prattling sweetly and hopefully of their future, her soft eyes turned up tenderly to his, and to feel the sympathetic pressure of her pretty little hand upon his arm as they turned through the Park towards the grassy knoll called Primrose Hill, when Blake came bustling in—Blake, a pleasant and usually good-humoured young fellow, satisfied always with the world in general, and himself in particular—but now looking pale, excited, and flurried—even frightened.

"What is the matter?" asked Seymour, with surprise.

"Some unaccountable mistake has occurred," replied Blake breathlessly; "and I hope you can explain it."

"Mistake about what?"

"That money you gave me."

"There could be none. I gave you twenty thousand pounds in notes."

"Less three thousand."

"What—impossible!" said Tom, starting from his seat; "those to whom you took them must be in error."

"I made them at the Inland seal up the money you gave me again, and here it is," said Blake, growing positively paler as he laid the packet on the desk before Seymour, over whose heart there came a sickly foreboding of coming evil, as he recalled the vague sense of it that occurred to him when Foxley and he shook hands.

"The notes were counted carefully over twice, Tom, and three thousand pounds are missing."

Tom tore open the drawer from which he had taken the money so shortly before. It was empty. Not a note was there; and now beads of perspiration poured over his temples, and his hands trembled as he proceeded in nervous haste to count over the notes, which he did again and again, till convinced beyond all doubt that only 17,000*l.* were there.

"What can have happened? Am I mad or dreaming?" he moaned out.

"You are neither, Tom, old fellow, and I am sorry for you. If this money is lost it will be your ruin."

"Ruin!" he muttered mechanically; and his heart went home to Mabel; but as yet he never thought of Foxley, till Blake said,

"When did you count the money?"

"Just before that gentleman called."

"And who is he?"

"My wife's cousin; but *he* could have no hand in this mistake or misfortune. I took the money from the drawer wherein I had locked it, and sealed it up before him."

"Well," said Blake gloomily, "we must report to the comptroller—that is all about it."

That official—a very awful personage indeed, and with an intense idea of his own rank, power, and consequence, though originally a man of very mean birth—heard with intense gravity, and a growing severity of countenance, the reports of Seymour and Blake. He glared at the former under, over, and through his spectacles, as vague suspicions of betting, of secret speculation with the hope of refunding, or of Tom's having "overrun the constable" by getting rashly married,

flitted through his mind. So, after ordering sundry books to be searched, it appeared beyond all doubt that the money had been lost in Seymour's hand. The too-evident misery of the latter softened the great man a little; but he said very grimly:

"*How* you have lost this money, whether by inadvertence or design, is nothing to me, or those to whom we are accountable; but if it is not forthcoming in a few hours, you must refund it, Mr. Seymour—refund it how best you can."

"Good God, sir!" exclaimed Tom; "I have, as you know, only my salary to depend upon. *How* am I to do so?"

"I am very sorry for you," replied the comptroller coldly; "but that is your affair, not mine."

"My poor wife! my little Mabel!"

"Ah, you should have thought of her before."

"Before what, sir?"

"Doing what you have done."

"I have done nothing!" exclaimed Tom hoarsely and fiercely, his voice no longer under control.

"You have lost—I hope not embezzled—3000*l.* of Government money, and means must be taken to discover where it is gone," replied the comptroller, dashing off a hasty note. "No one would steal 3000*l.* without taking the whole, and Mr. Blake acted wisely in bringing back the rest sealed up by an official seal—that of the Inland Revenue Office."

The comptroller rang a bell, and a messenger in livery promptly appeared.

"Take this instantly to Scotland Yard. We must have the detectives at work without delay."

Sick-hearted, bewildered—having only in his mind the overwhelming sense of a dreadful calamity and certain disgrace, with a vague suspicion (which could take no form) of his late visitor—Tom, after sitting for some time like one spellbound in his room, and giving all the information that was in his power to a couple of sleek-looking and ferret-eyed detectives, went home to Mabel with a brain that seemed on the verge of bursting, almost glad to escape the condolences of his brother-officials, among whom he was very popular. Thus the story of the scrape that he was in flew like electricity from department to department.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE MORNING PAPER.

AFTER this catastrophe, events seemed to follow each other with calamitous rapidity.

"Can Alf have done it? who else? But I never saw or heard him move," were ever his thoughts. "Impossible! he was not near my drawer; I was not out of the room even for a moment after I counted the money. Heaven and earth, where can the missing notes be! O Mabel, Mabel! can I —dare I tell her of this? To crush her poor little heart by terror for me, and bitter suspicions of Alf, when—O most desperate of chances!—those Scotland-yard fellows may find it all to be some hideous mistake! No, no, no! How can this matter end but in my ruin and hers—hers! Oh, whatever happens to me, surely her parents will never be so cruel as to permit her to suffer for this!"

He dreaded to return to the longing and wondering Mabel, lest she should read the dreadful secret in his pallid face. So he forgot all about their appointment, and wandered along in the Park alone, till the falling rain roused him from his heart-aching reverie, and drove him home to the gloomy street, which seemed doubly gloomy now. He was compelled to tell Mabel of the calamity that had befallen him. He felt more at ease when his grief was shared by her; but it may be imagined how the night was passed in wild and vague, sad and desperate, surmises. Early next morning he was told by the somewhat scared-looking servant that two men wished to see him, and were in the entrance-hall. Two men!

"Do you think, love, they have found the money?" asked Mabel, looking up, all unslept, from her pillow, while Tom dressed in haste, and a little flush of hope gathered in her pale cheeks.

"I hope so, darling." But his heart foreboded *who* his visitors were. Then he drew forth and placed his watch and purse on her toilet-table, and saying, "Do not be alarmed if I am absent some hours," he took a long, tremulous, and farewell kiss, and hurried away like a man anxious to meet his fate, and to know and face the worst at once.

He knew that the fatal hour had come, so he confronted

the men quietly. They were mean-looking, but respectably dressed and perfectly civil.

"Your name is Mr. Thomas Seymour?" said one.

"Yes," replied Tom.

"Then we have a warrant for your arrest."

"On what charge?"

"Why, governor," said the other, "I think you need scarcely ask—embezzling three thousand pounds of Government money."

"A serious job you will find, sir. We have a cab at the door, so come along."

And more than ever did the whole affair seem some dreadful and unrealisable nightmare as he was driven, in the morning sunshine, through the bustle of the chief thoroughfares of the City, till they turned to the right into a narrow street.

To Tom every stage of this humiliating drama, in which he acted, automaton-like, a part, seemed but portions of a fantastic dream from which he *must* infallibly awaken. His examination was very brief, for the civic functionary was sharp, short, and decisive. Tom admitted the loss of the money, adding that to him it was unaccountable, and reserved his defence. That he had been visited by some one—a man in a light grey-coloured dust-coat—was known. Who was this person? Tom hesitated, being loth to bring disgrace upon Mabel through the mention of her cousin. So his visitor was deemed an accomplice; and though bail for his appearance at any time was offered by the gentlemen in his own department, the magistrate refused to accept it, and Foxley's victim was removed with other prisoners in the van, to a common prison, there to await his trial. *In the van!* How could he ever survive such companionship as he found therein! and the horror he had of that stolid "conductor" in the blue uniform without, who read his halfpenny *Echo* undisturbed by all the bustle and row around him!

To Mabel he wrote, telling her of all this, and beseeching her to take heart, for as he was innocent he was certain to come off with flying colours. But her heart died within her, and she seemed turned to stone while she read the words his beloved hand had inscribed.

Then the light went out of the poor girl's eyes ; the room swam round her, and more than half an hour elapsed before she became aware, by the coldness of her hands and feet, that she had fainted. Then an unavailing torrent of tears that she shed somewhat relieved her, and she flung herself on her bed—the bed wherein she was fated to sleep for many a night alone.

On the second day after this event let us peep into the breakfast-room at Thaneshurst. Summer had come on there apparently—sooner than usual this year—and all the trees and shrubberies were in full foliage, and the dog-roses and honeysuckle were masses of odorous blossom. The fragrance of flowers and the hum of bees stole in through the windows with the heat of the summer sunshine. The green downs were steeped in silver haze. On such a morning, how pretty and bright and fresh Mabel was wont to look, in a charming light-blue robe she used to wear! And Mr. Brooke was thinking so, as he gazed dreamily at the distant sea. Her face and figure came to the old man's eyes, so the vista of the landscape seemed blurred and indistinct.

There were no visitors now at Thaneshurst, so on this morning, as it eventually proved, luckily the three persons at table were only Alfred Foxley (in a most becoming dressing gown, faced and tasselled with silk), his aunt and uncle. Even the servants in plush and powder were dispensed with now, and Mrs. Brooke served the tea and coffee—once Mabel's office —from silver pots that were white as the cloth on which they stood, for Mr. Mulbery rather prided himself on the state of his plate-chest.

"Seen the papers, sir, this morning?" asked Alf as he tossed away his half-smoked cigar, and came in from the garden, humming the last music-hall air.

"No ; but *you* seem to have been early at the *Times*."

Alf coloured a little, and took up the paper referred to, and said sententiously,

"You always believed, sir, in the honesty of that cad Tom Seymour?"

"Don't call Mabel's husband a cad," said the old man hoarsely, "and yet—yet—it was a scandalous act of him to do here as he did."

"But you always thought him honest?"

"I *think* him honest still."

"You will be surprised to learn that he is likely to go abroad."

"With Mabel?"

"No."

"How then?"

"At her Majesty's expense."

"What *do* you mean, Alf?" exclaimed Mrs. Brooke, looking up from her tea-tray.

"I mean, aunt, that the fellow is in a hole, and is not likely to get out of it."

"A hole!"

"Yes, a precious one."

"Don't talk slang, Alf," said his aunt impatiently and severely.

"Well, uncle, I have to inform you," continued Alf, "that the valued son of your old friend will, in a short time from this, be expanding his chest, developing his biceps and the calves of his legs, amid the exhilarating movements of the treadmill. There, sir, read that: 'Serious Charge of Embezzlement in a Government Office.'"

"Embezzlement!"

"Yes, sir, to the tune of three thousand pounds."

Mrs. Brooke started from the table, and Alf resumed his music-hall air, while Mr. Brooke grew very pale and nervous as he read in haste a paragraph detailing Tom's arrest, the accusation against him, that bail had been refused, and that he had been committed for trial. He groaned, crushed up the paper, then spread it out on the table with trembling hands, while Alf eyed him mischievously and drank his coffee.

"What fresh horror is this?" said Mr. Brooke, in a broken voice. His Mabel, *his* daughter—he, the strict and honourable city merchant, whose name on 'Change was irreproachable—the wife of a felon! It was awful and incredible; a blackness within the dark shadow that Seymour had cast over Thaneshurst. Hours elapsed before they—he and Martha—could talk of it with any calmness.

To Mr. Brooke it seemed that if they had been more merciful and forgiving, less harsh in their views of these young

people, this dreadful catastrophe—born, he doubted not, of limited means on one hand, and human vanity on the other, with opportunity and temptation—had never occurred. But Mrs. Brooke and Alf suggested that the new disgrace and publicity brought upon them all was only part and parcel of "that cad's" life and system. He must always have been a bad fellow at heart; Alf had ever suspected him, and under the microscope of the criminal law all the secrets of his character would be dragged into the glare of open daylight.

"Yes, sir," added Alf, warming with his congenial subject, "his antecedents will be thoroughly investigated, and your eyes opened."

To Mrs. Brooke it only seemed evident that he who could lure away Mabel, and thus cross *her* plans, was "fit for treason, stratagem, and spoil," and she reviled him with all the bitterness of which her heart was capable, till her husband said, "O Martha dear, do let us be merciful! Mabel's marriage—"

"Silence, John Brooke! Her marriage was begun in disobedience and gross deception, and now, as might be expected, it has ended in shame, dishonour, and misery. Poor child, poor child! Alf—" What she was about to say was not said; for that worthy, as if overcome by his feelings, quitted the room, but soon returned; indeed he seemed rather restless on this morning.

"My poor Mabel—my darling—my lost child!" exclaimed Mr. Brooke, in the fulness of his genuinely affectionate heart; "oh, that you should see now only the dark and sordid side of human life! After all that we had thought and planned for her, Martha; the one chick that we had to scrape for! How little could I ever have believed, Alf, that her husband—the son of old Tom Seymour, who was with me at Scrawls—could have proved himself to be—God forgive me!—the traitor and scoundrel he is!"

"True, uncle: but you should never have brought him here," replied his nephew, laughing.

"So your aunt Martha is never weary of telling me; but, thank heaven, I have you left, Alf—my own sister's only son; but Mab—poor Mab!—embezzlement—perhaps he has done it for her sake—who knows?"

Suddenly the old gentleman said, "You, Alf, take your cousin's terrible situation and distress very coolly. You have your feelings admirably under control."

"Better, my dear sir, for one to be rather blunt than oversensitive in this world," replied the unabashed Foxley.

Beating the floor with her foot and rocking herself to and fro, Mrs. Brooke continued to vituperate against Tom Seymour so deeply, and so bitterly that Mr. Brooke ventured to say, while patting her on the shoulder,

"O Martha dear, it is all very well for old folks like you and me, who have well-nigh forgotten what love means, at least such love as that of Tom and Mabel, to be mighty wise in our generation, but let us be merciful to the young, the foolish——"

"And the criminal!"

"And let us consider what is to be done."

"Done! What *can* be done, John, but to let the law take its course?"

To Mrs. Brooke this most unexpected event was agony upon agony. All London—at least *her* London—would know whom the culprit had married—their daughter! She dreaded even to face her own servants, as from Polly Plum she learned that all in the servants' hall were full of it, with a thousand wild details unknown even to the astute Draco before whom the unfortunate Tom had figured. Poor Mrs. Brooke! her overweening pride and ambition had truly met with a miserable fall.

"Here is something more about it!" exclaimed Mr. Brooke, whose eyes had been wandering over the *Times*. "'*The Late Embezzlement Case*. The police have obtained a clue to the man in the light gray-coloured dust-coat, who visited Seymour, and are now on his trail.'"

"The man in the light-gray coat—*who* can he be?" asked Mrs. Brooke, looking up.

"Some accomplice, perhaps," suggested Alf, with uneasiness, as he again left the room. The gray-coloured dust-coat! Foxley did not like the reference to this garment, which he at once secured in a secret drawer of his wardrobe, and resolved to wear no more. He might get himself in an ugly scrape as well as Seymour, who doubtless must have referred to his

visit. He got a stiff "conscience-quieter" of brandy-and-soda from Mulbery, and walked into the garden to think. Naturally a coward, he was full of selfish terror now. This was a move on the board he might have foreseen; but did not. He felt his knees unsteady under him, and his hands shook when he took a cigar from his case, and tried to strike a vesta against a tree.

"By Jove, I shall air my figure on the other side of the Channel till this affair blows over," said he, and took his plans at once; and walking into Lewes, he telegraphed to *himself* at Thaneshurst, and giving out that he was going up to London, sailed that night from Harwich to Rotterdam, devoutly wishing now that he had never done what he had, or had the temptation to do wrong to Tom put in his way; yet believing that he had effectually cut Mabel—and through her Tom—out of all chance of benefiting by Mr. Brooke's will. "I doubt," says a writer, "if the imagination of love can be more remorseless than is that of avarice in sweeping away obstacles between itself and what it desires to possess."

Mr. Brooke also took some secret movements. He had remarked in the paper the address of the house in which Tom Seymour had been arrested; he could stand this state of matters no longer; and three days after, pleading business in town, he put his cheque-book in his pocket and duly repaired to the corner house at Harley Street, but only to find that Mabel had left it, and was gone—no one knew whither. Gone alone into the wilderness—the vast roaring world of London.

And, as he turned away with a heavy heart, he lifted his now haggard gaze to the windows of the house, and he thought how often—but he knew not how sadly and wearily—must her dear eyes have looked from them into that gloomy avenue of bricks!

For weeks Mr. Brooke was confined to his room, and sometimes to his bed, by a kind of mental fever, and faithful old Mulbery scarcely ever left his side. If he rested or reposed at all, it was in the daytime. By night, the poor old man paced his room like a caged lion, for hours and hours, watched by the pale and terrified, and now perfectly humbled, Martha, who appeared somewhat appalled by the calamity

which she seemed somehow, unintentionally, to have brought about.

## CHAPTER XL.

### MABEL LEAVES HARLEY STREET.

WE must now state the reason why Mr. Brooke did not find Mabel at the boarding-house.

When her first wild paroxysm of grief was past she seated herself upon her bed and began to think, or rather strove to think, with coherency.

"Arrested—a prisoner—Tom!" She muttered the words to herself again and again; they seemed to sound in her ears; to be written in the air and on the walls of the room: and a dreadful and alarming sense of the unreality of everything, even her own identity and existence, seemed to take possession of her and stupefy her thoughts.

She started up; she would fly to him; she must see him, were she to die the next moment. Should they—she knew not who "they" were—be so cruel as to refuse to admit her, she would dash herself against the prison-gates, as, ere now, she had seen a poor bird do against the bars of its cage. But the next moment saw her sinking down to grovel on the carpet, in deeper despair, for she now remembered that the unfortunate fellow, in his haste or confusion, had omitted to mention to which prison or house of detention he had been taken; so the mind of Mabel shudderingly thought of Newgate—of Newgate, with its massive granite walls all sooty and grimy—walls that no amount of sunshine will brighten, and no amount of life or noisy surrounding enliven—that dismal receptacle of crime, which, though new comparatively, looks as if built ages ago—and her despairing fancy drew a picture of him there. Her next thought was of an appeal to her father; but now another little cry of pain escaped her when she remembered that a letter from Milly had mentioned a rumour that he was on the Continent, she knew not where; and Mabel thought, all things considered, that this was very likely to be the case.

"O papa, could I but see you once again, hear your dear

voice, and feel your kind old kisses on my cheek, I am sure you would forgive me and save my darling Tom !" she wailed out. The former was very probable, the latter impossible. But she knew not that ; for with Mabel papa was everything, all powerful, she thought in the City.

Tom arrested, her husband torn from her, and not coming punctually home from his office as usual, perhaps never to come again ; yet there were his slippers and dressing-gown ; there were his pipes, razors, and hair-brushes, his watch and purse, where the thoughtful fellow had placed them for her use—all making the place full of his presence, What did it all mean? There seemed only to be something dreadful, stunning, and impending hanging over her or already on her which she could neither comprehend nor explain to herself, though the sense of it ground her to the dust.

In her mind she had no future if Tom was blotted out of it; all was darkness, utter darkness and void. It was well, she thought, that poor baby was dead and gone ; and yet now, oh, how she would have caressed and kissed it for its father's sake !

Her violet-blue eyes looked tender still, but, oh, how sad and weird and weary ! The light had faded out of them, and her rosebud mouth was pale. She was alone now, most fearfully alone, this once bright, soft, and gentle girl, all heart and love. Even Tom had been taken from her ! Her old home-circle seemed far, far away. The domestic tones and ties of every-day life and love, the kisses of papa and mamma, the "good-morning" in the sunny breakfast-room, and the "good-night" after prayers, cheered her girl-heart no more. What had she done to deserve all this? Sunrise and sunset were alike to Mabel now. She was sick, sick and sore at heart, and filled with spasms of yearning and terror. All the mimic woes of which she had read in novels—all that she had seen in plays—all that she had seen in paintings of cases such as her own—of returned runaways dying on their parents' threshold—of disobedience punished or forgiven—of accusations against the innocent and the oppression of fate and power—came flashing back upon her memory now. But even were the path open to her—ever the last thing to be thought of in her case—were her mother's arms open to receive her—could

she, dared she, go back to Thaneshurst and to luxury while Tom Seymour was lingering in prison, branded with shame in degradation and suffering?

Or, under all these circumstances, could she go back to Park Lane and sleep in her old room, that luxurious chamber of which she could recall every ornament and detail, while Tom was reposing, or more likely tossing feverishly, on a pallet in a cell?

Was it to her, Mabel Seymour, all this misery was happening—this misery so new to her? It seemed so utterly unrealisable that she felt oddly that it must be occurring not to her but to some other person, as if her individuality had changed. How did it all come to pass? She was benumbed in spirit.

Awed by false shame, for the story of her husband's arrest could not be concealed, she, even in her perfect purity and innocence, quailed before the eyes of all now, even the inmates of the boarding-house, which she would soon have to leave for some more humble abode.

So passed the first night of her great sorrow. Next morning a letter came from Milly Allingham. By contrast with her own aching misery, how empty, how frivolous it seemed! —though Milly's letters had greatly changed in tone and tenor since the event of Stanley's abrupt departure, not only from her but from England,—and it failed to draw Mabel one moment from her misery.

It was all about the gaieties of the crowded country-house where she and her mamma were residing, and its tone was half wild, half miserable. She had been here, there, and everywhere—at meets, balls, dinners, drums, and parties; the dresses she wore; Lord This and Sir That; and she had met Fanny and Badenoch on their marriage tour, looking *so* happy and jolly, she seeming all blushes and dimples as of old; and ever and anon there were references to poor Rowland Stanley, and a statement that she had been storing her mind with much information about the Bermudas, and quite knew by heart all about them in Edwards's *West Indies*, Cotter's *Sketches*, and the Abbé Raynal. A peer had made her a proposal as they were flirting one day in the recess of an oriel window; she really believed that he did so because the day

was one of rain, and they were all caged up indoors ; but she thought of her "own Stanley at Bermuda ;" amid unbounded gaiety she confessed herself to be dissatisfied with everything and every one about her, and only laughed his lordship into a huff.

Mabel crushed the letter up impatiently, attired herself and hurried into the streets to visit Tom's solicitor, Mr. Skeemes, in a den off the vast and sunshiny square of Lincoln's Inn.

Though the latter never doubted but that the grand jury, when their time for meeting came, would find a true bill against his client, touched by the youth and beauty, the sorrow and sweetness of Mabel, whose story he knew, and though believing little in human goodness or human honesty, he hastened to assure her that her husband's affair would prove a wild accusation in the end, and would certainly be cleared up. Meantime, he added, nothing should be left undone to trace his visitor.

"Visitor?" said Mabel, looking up with a questioning air. "The morning paper, in its paragraph, makes no mention of one."

"Because Mr. Seymour, while reserving his defence, most unwisely, I think, concealed or omitted to mention that most important fact to the magistrate on the bench, but told *me* in confidence."

"Who was it?"

"Mr. Alfred Foxley."

"My cousin!"

"Exactly so, my dear young lady, though *how* his visit may bear upon the case we do not yet exactly see."

She now learned where Tom was, and resolved to see him without a moment's delay ; and as the man of six-and-eightpence was anxious to be rid of a visitor whose consultation could not be a paying one, she withdrew.

From the moment she learned that Alf, the evil one, had so unexpectedly visited Tom, she felt certain that *he* and no other, in spite of Tom's doubts and assertions to the contrary, as the solicitor told her, was the perpetrator of this awful calamity upon them both—an act born, she was certain, of jealousy, rancour, and hate. She resolved, by instantly economising, to collect or raise money for Tom's defence and the unmask-

ing of her cousin; and courage gathered in her brave little heart as it nerved itself for the occasion.

Thus the night before she left, for a cheap lodging, that dull boarding-house which had been for nearly a year to her and Tom a kind of home by use and want, poor little Mabel had cried herself to sleep, alone, with the bitterest of bitter tears. Could she have known *who* was to call for her there in vain the next day—"papa," her own affectionate, forgiving, and silver-haired "papa!"

## CHAPTER XLI.

### "IN VEXED BERMOOTHES."

SWIFT as the electric telegraph nowadays may the novelist in in his story range over all the world without violating the "unities," that pet word of the old critics.

It was a summer evening in one of the Bermuda isles, where summer is perpetual—the land of Caliban and the scene of Shakespeare's *Tempest*, and of one of Waller's now forgotten poems; long the fabled abode of devils and, according to old Jourdan, "a most prodigious and enchanting place, affording nothing but gusts, storms, and foul weather."

Evening parade was over, and, attired somewhat lightly, his neck open, his shell-jacket unbuttoned, and a broad round straw-hat on his head, Rowland Stanley was seated under the verandah in front of his quarters, or lounging rather in a long cane-bottomed easy-chair, a cigar between his teeth—a cigar taken from a case the gift of "little Wickets," Fanny Conyer's brother—a glass of brandy-and-water beside him, and in his hand a novel, the perusal of which he often relinquished to gaze dreamily at the sea and the scenery, such as it was.

Before him stretched such "yellow sands" as those of which Ariel sings so invitingly; the same sands whereon, perhaps, the first Englishman who ever trod these shores landed—to wit, Henry May, and who, when cast away there on the 17th of December 1593, found thereby the quaint wrecks of three ancient Spanish argosies, one of which had been named, after her captain, Juan Bermudas, whose name he gave to those four hundred islets that are now the key to our Western colonies.

Bermuda appears a fairyland at first sight, but ere long the eye wearies of the leafless cedar, though ever green ; of the somewhat barren isles, with the sheets of shining water between; of the sands where the turtles sprawl, and the rocks where the palmetto berries, or wild plums, pumpkins, and golden melons ripen ; though there are sweet little valleys, where coffee, cotton, and indigo grow, and groves of the orange and lemon, citron and lime, glow under the tropical sun, and under the foliage of which the kingfisher flits and the ground-dove builds its nest.

But as there are no places worthy of being called towns—Hamilton and St. George's being little better than villages—Bermuda is a station where the young English officer soon becomes bored and ennuyed ; hence Stanley, after the excitements of his year's leave at home, cordially agreed with those of the mess who termed the station a "horrible hole." He, with his peculiar chum and subaltern, Neddy Knollys, had done all the mild stimulations of the place ; had investigated all the caves that abound in stalactites and stalagmites for which Walsingham is so famous ; had picnicked with the ladies of the regiment, and such other feasible girls as could be found, at Paynter Vale, under the shadow of the famous double-stemmed calabash-tree ; done amateur theatricals, and the Governor's balls, and feasts at Mount Langton ; fished for mudian lawyers and gray snappers ; shot wild ducks and gray plover in all directions, without leave or license ; been mooning together on detachment at Ireland Island, where they got mutually so cross with life that they quarrelled, but became reconciled the moment they rejoined at St. George's, where Stanley's corps—the only one in Bermuda—with a few of the Royal Artillery, formed the garrison. All these and other things had Stanley done again and again, and found that, so far as life at Bermuda was concerned, there was "nothing in it," as Sir Cullender Yawn says in the farce.

The first thing that roused him was the arrival of a letter from Tom Seymour, after many unintelligible delays, describing all the misconception in the matter of that unlucky camellia, on which he had somewhat foolishly, he began to think—especially after his little *affaire du cœur* at San Miguel—permitted too much to hinge ; and though Milly Allingham had

trifled with him very much, he now began to conclude that he had been too precipitate, and she no doubt had consoled or revenged herself by accepting Val Reynolds, though no reference to any such event was made in a subsequent letter from Tom Seymour; but then that letter was full of his own exciting affairs—the elopement with Mabel, their marriage, and all that had transpired since Stanley's sudden evanishment from the Hussar ball at Brighton.

Over the myriad miles of ocean his mind went back to that night; how remote and distant seemed all connected with it now!

For a man in Stanley's mood of mind Bermuda was about the worst place he could be stationed in. Out of the garrison there was little or no society; the population are negroes, and though some of the better-class women are pretty, they are often half-caste and *gauche*—fearfully so, after Regent Street and Rotten Row. He had rejoined in a discontented and somewhat moody frame of mind, and to his brother-officers he was rather an enigma.

"What the devil has come to Rowly?" one would say to another. "Has he fallen in love, or debt, or what?"

"He can't be such a muff as to have fallen very deep in either," responded Neddy Knollys; "for wherever we have been—from Chatham to Candahar, from Athlone to Agra—he has been the jolliest of the jolly. If he kept a wicket, he marched off the field with his bat on his shoulder; if he rode a race, won it; if he went to a ball, he had the prettiest and the best round-dancing girl to himself all night; so *what* is up now? He has got into the hands of the Israelites, is going to send in his papers and leave us, or something."

It was quite evident that the old mess-room jokes—about how Brown broke the bay mare's knees; of Jones's spill at the hurdle-race; of Robinson's famous playing, when he made ever so many strokes, all running, off the red ball, and yet lost a pot of money to the paymaster, &c.—all palled upon and failed to interest him.

"How did you spend your leave, Rowly?" asked Neddy Knollys, one of those surmisers, more than once.

"I spent it in London," he replied curtly.

"Doing what?" asked Ned.

"Studying."

"Oh, come—by Jove! studying—*you?*"

"Closely, old fellow."

"What?"

"Pretty faces—town's the best place in the world for that," he would reply, finding that chaff must be met with the same commodity. But often, in the barrack of that stupid place, when gazing at planets, at the southern cross, at the stars, or at "the hole in the sky" (that place where there are no stars at all), as the sailors call it; or when, as on this evening, he was seated in the verandah, gazing at the sea, he had many a waking dream of her who was far, far away, doing he knew not what—flirting, conversing, or driving, he knew not with whom—and in spirit kissed her.

How little could he have thought that often she, too, at these identical times, was thinking of *him* in the same fashion!

And so he strove, but vainly, to adopt the maxim, that "our best wisdom is to enjoy the hour that we live, and not to look forward too keenly to the future. To the day be the evil thereof." He was trying his best to think so now, as he lolled in his cane-framed and cane-bottomed easy-chair, with his heels higher than his head, alternately watching the concentric circles of smoke from his well-moustached mouth, and the glittering sea, where there was, beating off Grassy Bay, one of those Bermudian boats, the cut of which is so peculiar, having a light draught forward, a long heel or deep stern-post, with one mast well raked aft, carrying a triangular main-sail, foresail, jib, and a gaff-topsail, tapering into the blue sky.

"Why should I think of her still?" he muttered, as the novel fell from his hand, and he would have been puzzled to tell what he had been reading about. "Is not the past done with for ever? I felt it so in that isle of San Miguel, as much as if I was living in another world, and had become another fellow."

That brief interval of lunacy or revenge, which you will, in the island was over and forgotten; and now, after the tidings in Tom's first letter, there is no doubt that Milly's image had been occurring to Stanley more and more, again and again. So true it is, as Miss Braddon says, that "when a man has once loved a woman, her face is always rising up before him,

pleading to him to think tenderly of her, let her have used him ever so badly. It always ends with his forgiving her. The memory of the days when she loved him is too much for his manhood. It always ends so."

But now, unless she had married "Reynolds or some other devilish fellow," Stanley, after Tom's letter, had nothing to forgive, and all his heart was going forth to Milly more than ever.

Yet he struggled with himself against that futile yearning, and would say to himself for the thousandth time :

"Why *do* I think of her, muff that I am, especially after that piece of folly with old De Vega's wife in the Azores? At this moment, perhaps, she is flirting with some such ass as Larkspur—flirting in such a way as she alone can do, scientifically, without looking or speaking unless it suits her, though well aware that every word uttered has a secret meaning, all unknown to the unconscious outsiders. Well do I know my lady's game and mode of procedure."

When drawing pictures such as these he grew very savage; and yet it chanced that, at this identical moment, Milly, while enjoying herself as best she might at the Hôtel de Hollande, overlooking the long bridge of boats at Cologne, and playing *Vergissmeinnicht* with great *empressement* to a blue-coated Prussian Herr Major, was surmising, a little spitefully, whether or not *he* was making love to "that Portuguese octoroon," as she called her, at San Miguel, for she had not as yet heard of his having rejoined his regiment at Bermuda.

That night there were to be amateur theatricals, under the patronage of the Governor, for some charity ; and a spacious gun-shed had been got up as a theatre, for which Neddy Knollys had painted the scenery on sundry canvas bed-sheets, on which B.O. and a broad arrow figured conspicuously. The histrionic aspirants—with a sublime contempt for sloats and flies, wings, traps, and lime-lights—had chosen, of course, the *Tempest*, and Stanley was to figure as Prospero, with Neddy, close-shaven, for Miranda, while the senior captain was to be Caliban.

As a counter-irritant to Milly, Stanley had been trying hard to get up a little affair with a pretty half-caste, who played Ariel with a smaller amount of raiment than even the tropics

warranted, and played her part well, for she had slender and graceful limbs, though she sang very feebly,

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
In a cowslip's bell I lie," &c.;

and Stanley was just beginning to think of some pretty present for her, such as the only jeweller's shop in St. George's might furnish, when there came a smart single knock on the door of his room.

"Come in," he responded; and then, passing through the uncarpeted and somewhat empty-looking apartment, came the bugle-major, who acted as regimental postman, and stood erect as a pike before him.

"Mail from Europe just come in—a letter for you, sir."

"Thanks."

The non-commissioned officer saluted, and marched off.

"From Tom of course—no. A lady's hand to me—unknown, by Jove!" He opened it, and sprang to his feet, exclaiming, "Heavens above! it is from Milly—Allingham—and to ME!"

## CHAPTER XLII.

### "A LOVERS' QUARREL IS BUT LOVE RENEWED."

ROWLAND STANLEY was so thoroughly bewildered that he had perused her letter thrice in nervous haste before he quite took in the whole tenor of it.

"London.

"My dear Captain Stanley,—I have now learned from Mabel Seymour that you know all—the mistake about that wretched little flower at Brighton, and *how* it was by chance appropriated by Captain Reynolds—*not* given to him by me; a flower in which your fate and mine was, by my folly rather than your romance, bound up; and I now know more—how well you loved me then, and how you love me still." ("She knows nothing of my folly on that island, bless her!" thought Stanley). "If you—oh, I know not how to pen it, for the whole spirit and tenor of this letter is so unusual—if you care to write to me, need I say the pleasure it will give me to hear from you? You twice proposed marriage, and in my pride

and petulance I trifled with your heart and my own ; hence I feel that I owe you reparation. I have done much to offend you, Rowland, but you love me, and—I love you. Let this *amende* satisfy. You know my pride, and how I must be humbled to write thus ; but it is to *you*.—Believe me ever yours faithfully, MILLY ALLINGHAM."

When he first opened this startling letter, there fell therefrom a tiny bunch of withered forget-me-nots, tied with a slender white ribbon. Carefully and anxiously, as if the fragments were something very precious indeed, he gathered them up; and as he did so his heart, now beating tumultuously, went back to the night of the ball in Park Lane, and the subsequent gift of a bouquet in the Park. How long, long ago these little events seemed to have happened!

His soul was filled now with the purest gratitude, and he felt himself brimming over with joy. He had no pride, so called, in the reception of a letter so singular and unusual from the impulsive Milly, or in the conviction that her great love for him had humbled the coquette ; for humbled and contrite she must have been to take the initiative thus, and write such a letter to him, confiding so in his love and honour.

His whole mind was now filled by a great gush of remorse for his jealousy, injustice, and haste at Brighton, and his vile mental aberration—for such he deemed it—at San Miguel. "How could I be such a jackass!" he muttered a hundred times. "Oh, if Milly knew of that, what would she think of me, the dear, dear angel!" &c., and much more to the same purpose. But for his own precipitance and intemperate haste, he might now have been the husband of Milly ; she might now have been by his side gazing out on the waters of the Western Ocean, or he with her in England on an extension of leave; or he might have cut the service for her sake altogether.

So, all unthinking that the mail would not leave St. George's for a week, or heedless of the circumstance, he flew to his desk, threw it open like a madman, and wrote to Milly an impassioned letter, full of prayerful thanks, fervent love, eternal gratitude, and much more that was meant for her eye alone.

That part of his letter achieved, he began to consider the

more important portion that was to follow—the suggestions for or arrangement of their own plans for the future.

In ten days more, he wrote, the regiment was to sail for the Mediterranean—he believed for garrison duty at Gibraltar. This at least would bring him to Europe, and nearer to *her*. If no seniors were applying for leave, he would obtain it again; and after the two thousand and odd miles of the Atlantic had been traversed, a week or so would find him by her side again. And here once more he ran out into the loving incoherences peculiar to such an epistle as his; and praying her to write to him again, addressed to the regiment at Gibraltar, he despatched it by his servant to the post, and became more composed, though he read and re-read her letter ere he could prevail upon himself, after kissing it very tenderly, to consign it to his desk.

How little could he have thought, when he heard the drums beating for reveille that morning, that when the same drums beat at sunset he should sit down at the mess-table an engaged man—engaged to Milly Allingham!

It was long ere he could persuade himself to join that festive board. He was so happy amid his own thoughts, and sat long alone in the starry dusk, while the voices of the red-bird, the mocking-bird, and of the Virginia nightingale, came softly on the evening air; for now, though far away in Bermuda, his waking dreams were once again of the dazzling Milly and a future in which she figured as his wife, and his own for ever.

Thus preoccupied, it may be supposed that, in the garrison theatricals that night, he made a sad muddle of his part as Prospero, and rather perplexed Neddy Knollys by often addressing him in this fashion:

> "Twelve year since, dear *Milly*, twelve year since,
> Thy father was the Duke of Milan, and
> A prince of power."

"What the devil *are* you talking about?" quoth Miranda aside; and then took her cue, "Sir, are not you my father?" &c. But the name of Milly would crop up again and again, till Knollys told Stanley he must "certainly be screwed," as he made them both the subject of unbounded laughter; and Neddy, though usually an extremely good-tempered fellow,

became furiously indignant; and as they were returning to their quarters after the invariable champagne that concludes such festivities, he turned short round upon Stanley and said,

"Who the deuce *is* this Milly, who seems to have come between you and your seven senses to-night?"

The advent of the letter, together with the champagne he had imbibed, had greatly softened the heart of Stanley, who now became seized with one of the fits of confidence which attack men at times so unaccountably; so he unbosomed himself to his friend—told about his quarrel with Milly and the spirit of her letter.

"By Jove, that girl is a brick!" was Neddy's warmest and offhand comment. "You'll marry her, of course, and be happy all the days and nights of your lives, like the people in novels," he added, laughing, while a strange and bitter expression stole over his open face; and Stanley had no subsequent regret in making a confidant of his friend; for Knollys, a handsome and rollicking young Englishman, had his gloomy and thoughtful moments at times—his "doldrums," he called them—for he had a story in which there was more romance than in Stanley's, a dark chapter of his life; and this fact, perhaps, made them the firmer friends mutually.

They had both in their solitary moments turned to Nature, reflection, and so forth, as comforters; and though the former is said to be a wondrous consoler for those who can appreciate her endearments and consolations, as Knollys said, "it took a deuced lot of her to console one in the Bermudas."

Neddy's great sorrow all came of a quarrel—a lover's quarrel too.

He had loved just such a girl as Milly Allingham, bright, coquettish, and fond of admiration—his cousin Kate Wilmot. They had been playmates in childhood; but when Knollys returned to London, after being a couple of years with his regiment in Ireland, Kate, then in her first season and all the bloom of her beauty, became at once the star of his life, the realisation of all his dreams; and he fell in love with her, of course, and the familiar ties of cousinship made this love run

perhaps too smoothly, for the young lady was proud, petulant, and at times somewhat exacting.

"You must go with me into the Row," said she one day, in the tone of one well used to have every wish but too readily acceded to.

"If you will sing me your song of the 'Moonbeam,' I shall do all I can to attend you."

"But I won't sing! All you can!" exclaimed the young lady pettishly, and with a haughty smile in her eyes and on her lips. "I know some one in particular who would do more."

"More! *Who* could do more for you than I?"

"Colonel Hippisley."

"The man is a—well, a dotard!" said Neddy angrily, for the attentions of this old field-officer, who was enormously wealthy—attentions too palpably encouraged by Kate's family—made him the blackest of all *bêtes noires* to her cousin.

"He is little more than twice as old as you; and then he is as rich as Crœsus."

"And he is encouraged for his wealth."

"How?"

"As your admirer!"

"I encourage none, Mr. Knollys."

"Neddy," he urged.

"Mr. Knollys," she repeated, pouting. "He gives me tickets or boxes for everything, bouquets, lovely presents, and all the devotion——"

"Of an old fool!"

"Of a brave gentleman, who has earned many a medal which *you* have yet to win."

"Dearest Kate, you'll break my heart if you talk to me in this tone!"

"Oh, nonsense; men's hearts don't break so easily."

Then more bitter words than we care to record ensued. The quarrel came greatly to the satisfaction of Kate Wilmot's parents, and they parted, these two, a silly youth and silly girl, yet loving each other passionately; parted with cold and haughty words, which they thought were never to be forgotten, and of course never, never to be forgiven; and

not long after Stanley found himself a guest at the bridal of Kate Wilmot and Colonel Hippisley, a well-preserved old beau, whose dyed whiskers and moustache were miracles of art, but whose settlements were every way satisfactory. But Stanley often said he never felt such pity in his heart before as when he saw the bride. It was less a marriage than a sale, the ceremony.

Her heart—if heart she had then—was with Edward Knollys, and not with the old man whose shrivelled fingers placed the consecrated ring on her left hand, and led her away with a smile that had more of triumph, cunning, and pride than love or ardour in it. He was naturally a cold and grim man, and had been long enough a bachelor to be very eccentric; moreover, he was, as the sequel proved, intensely jealous and cunning; yet this creature Kate had vowed to love, honour, and obey.

The lily was not more delicate than Kate seemed in her bridal veil and dress, "which looked like a frost-work suited to the frozen spirit it shrouded."

In that hour of triumphant bitterness, if we may use such a term, what availed her exquisite dress of lace and silk, her almost priceless veil, her costly bouquet in its wondrous *bouquetier*, her tiny slippers and delicate gloves, the velvet caskets full of pearls and diamonds, and all the showy shop-like splendour of her bridal gifts—the gifts of reprehensive friends!

"It is a most pitiful sacrifice," said one kind-hearted old lady.

"It is a thundering shame!" was the comment of her son; and many more were of the opinion, that, even with all the elements of wealth and luxury, such a union between December and May was but a loathsome sight, and that happiness could never come of it.

No doubt the colonel was proud of his bride; it was a brilliant achievement for an old fellow like him, to carry off from all her younger admirers a girl so beautiful as Kate Wilmot; and though he felt a malicious pleasure in parading her before them in the Row or other public places, he was rather careful and cautious about those he invited to his lonely villa near Hampton Court, where he chose to seclude

her, though Kate had begged hard for a mansion in Belgravia.

Her petulant pride of heart was gone now, and with it went all her love of gaiety and pleasure. The sacrifice, the dreadful mistake, she had made came terribly home to her heart, together with the crushing conviction that the deed she had done was irrevocable. Her music was neglected, her piano seldom opened, and she had a horror of the long stupid evenings, during which, when they were alone, with his handkerchief spread over his face, and the *Times* half dropping from his hand, her husband dozed the hours away in an easy-chair, till his valet carried him off to bed; while she, when walking or riding or driving, when amid busy crowds or alone, had ever by her side a face and form that none could see; in her ear, a voice heard by her alone; a heart next hers, yet that was far away. Day by day she cherished more and more her secret love for the absent Neddy Knollys, abandoning herself to it rather than seeking to thrust it from her, though often she clasped her hands and wrung them in silent agony when none was by to see her.

Colonel Hippisley knew nothing of the love that had existed between the cousins, and, to do him justice, watched with anxiety the growing pallor in his young wife's cheek; but he had no idea of "the worm" that was in the bud, till one day, when, over a glass of port, he was sitting at "the Rag," intrenched behind an outspread newspaper, he heard some fragments of a conversation regarding his wife and her cousin Edward Knollys—their love, their quarrel, and how Kate had married—*him*, Colonel Hippisley!—in revenge, "cutting off her nose to spite her pretty face, by Jove, don't you know, and all that sort of thing," added one "confounded puppy," as the colonel thought him, to the other.

Though choking with rage and mortification, jealousy and disappointment, he softly put down his paper, took his hat and stick, and issued into the street, to think over what he had heard. So it was thus his marriage was canvassed and talked about—the brilliant Kate had married him simply in revenge, and now she was repentant. This accounted for the pallor of her face, the lassitude and indifference of her manner, the steady languor and gloom, no sunshine or gaiety

could brighten or dispel. He saw it all now—all, when too late. He recalled then a thousand little episodes and trifles connected with this very cousin prior to his marriage, and these had the effect of galling him to frenzy; old though his blood was, it rose to fever-heat; and he muttered in his rage as he walked along, using much bad language, but failing to relieve his mind thereby.

Home—he would not go home. The very thought of Kate sitting where he could picture her, calm and pale, indifferent to his presence or absence, careless of all the world around her, galled and worried him. Thus he instantly conceived and put in practice a scheme for discovering the truth of what those men said, for unmasking Kate if it were true, and to punish her for the deceit she had practised.

We have said that the colonel was eccentric and intensely cunning. He drew a heavy cheque on his banker, and wrote a brief note to Kate, saying that he had been suddenly summoned to North Wales about some property he had there, and would be absent a week or two; and as he would have many uninteresting people to see, he must deny himself the pleasure of taking her with him.

The evening post brought this missive to Kate, who had never been left an entire day alone since her marriage; and as she read it a sigh of actual relief escaped her, and for the first time for many, many weeks a real, and not artificial, smile rippled over her pale face.

Two days brought her another letter from the absent Othello, who, in the furtherance of his scheme, had actually gone to North Wales, and now informed her he was going to take a boat and go fishing on the Bala Lake. There, in due time, the empty boat was found floating about with the colonel's wideawake, overcoat, gloves and cigar-case. All his tenantry believed the poor man had been drowned, and spent days in dragging the lake for the sad remains of their landlord, who at the time was airing his figure at Basle in Switzerland.

To say that Kate—though inexpressibly shocked, and repenting that she had not loved him more—either wept or mourned for him would be to state that which is not true, though she donned the deepest garb of woe that even Jay

could furnish, and more than ever secluded herself in her mansion near Bushey Park.

A few weeks after this event, it chanced that Neddy's regiment was quartered in the Tower, and nothing was so natural as that he should leave a card on his widowed cousin, after the shocking event that had occurred.

She was at home, and in her widow's weeds looked touchingly handsome. What more natural than that he should come again and again! Was he not her cousin? And soon he found that she was his own loving Kate, and full of that repentance which was sure to lead to happiness.

"Your—your husband is dead now," said he, on one occasion, not that the information was new to her, but that the assertion implied something ulterior.

"I have been faithful to him, Neddy," she replied, with a tender smile; "very faithful."

"To the spirit of your promise; yet in your heart, dear Kate—"

"O God, forgive me, but in my heart of hearts I never ceased to love you!" she exclaimed, in a broken and touching voice.

"Poor child! for you were but a child, Kate, on that accursed day which rent you from me—a crisis born of my own folly!"

"And mine too, Neddy; we were mad to quarrel, loving each other as we did."

An expression—the passion of great love—filled all the girl's face with wondrous beauty and animation as she spoke, and Knollys started forward.

"Not yet, dear Neddy," said she, averting her cheek; "you must not kiss me—*yet*."

And now they—like Stanley in his waking hours—were so happy; so true it is that

"A lovers' quarrel is but love renewed."

Every moment Neddy Knollys could steal from his duties at the Tower was now spent at the house of his widowed cousin, and the time of their probation, as they deemed it, flew swiftly past.

With Hampton Court Gardens and Bushey Park to wander in side by side and talk over their future, how delicious

were the hours! How enchanting the summer evenings spent on the river, when he and she were alone, and let their boat float idly with the tide, he forgetful of all the world but the lovely girl who sat before him, his own Kate once more, with her heavy brown hair so smoothly banded over her white brow, and with her soft dark eyes gazing shyly into his; and she also, forgetful of all but the handsome and athletic young fellow in his light jersey, with his idle sculls poised on his knees, and his eyes bent fondly, dreamily, and passionately on her face! And so, hour by hour, would they sit, while the boat drifted on and on, past willowed isles, and all that lovely silvan scenery for which old Father Thames is unsurpassed, till the shades of evening mellowed on the stream, the gold and crimson died away on the chestnut, the oak, and the beech, and the last crow cawed and wheeled aloft on his homeward way.

One evening, after such a dreamy row upon the river, they were seated together in an arbour of the garden adjoining the house. The sunlight had died away from the topmost branches of the giant chestnuts in Bushey Park, and all was very still around them. Nothing seemed to stir but the last gnats that darted about in groups on the warm evening air. How sweetly tranquil looked the garden on this occasion; how exquisite was the fragrance of the lilac, the rose-trees, and the hawthorn; while the pink-and-white blossoms of the apple-trees shimmered in the strengthening light of the moon!

The lover-cousins were talking in low and confidential tones—tones that were full of exquisite tenderness—of their future plans, their future hopes and mutual home. Kate's head was on Neddy's breast, and her eyes, like his, were full of happiness and love.

"You remember what we quarrelled about, darling?" said Neddy.

"The song of the 'Moonbeam'—oh, yes."

"Sing it to me now, love."

"O Neddy, there is nothing I could refuse you *now!*" she exclaimed; and with wonderful sweetness and pathos she began the little song referred to—a quaint song from the German, we believe—

"Silently, oh, silently,
The moonbeam falls on me;
Silently, as silently,
It falls on land and sea.

Silently, still silently,
Creation's wings wax bright;
Silently, more silently,
Bright morn succeeds to night.

Oh, let my soul, my soul, thus silently
Depart from earthly clay;
Thus silently, but beamingly,
Enter the realms of day."

"How like the old tender times it seems to hear you sing so, darling Kate—my own, own Kate!"

"I often feared, Neddy, that we loved each other too much as cousins to be—to be——"

"Happy as husband and wife, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"You have been six months a widow," said he softly.

"Six whole months, darling."

"*When* is it to be, Kate?"

"At least a year must expire."

"A year—a *whole* year, dearest!"

"Yes, Neddy. Otherwise what would the world say? and what would——"

"Colonel Hippisley think?" croaked a voice there was no mistaking, as the dreadful figure of the supposed drowned man, dreadful at such a time, appeared like an apparition before them. "Very sorry to interrupt you, my dear madam," said he, with a ferocious sneer; "but I hope this gentleman will now see the propriety of betaking himself to his military duties at the Tower of London, and with as little delay as possible."

A low wail escaped Kate as she sank down in a state of insensibility; and how he made his way eastward that night to the Tower, whether by 'bus, cab, or railway, was always a mystery to poor Neddy Knollys.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

### TOM IN PRISON.

MR. SKEEMES, the solicitor, had said that he did not exactly see how Mr. Alfred Foxley's visit to Seymour bore upon the case; yet his production in evidence he deemed to be absolutely necessary after Mabel informed him at a subsequent visit of the proposal of marriage he had made for himself, of the views he long had regarding her, and his steady and undisguised hatred of her husband.

He saw an animus at once. He could, through the medium of his legal education and the general bent of his own mind, understand any emotion that was hateful; and jealousy he knew to be the most fierce and bitter of human passions, for it is born of personal vanity, and in Foxley's instance it was farther inflamed by cupidity and baffled avarice.

Aware now that Mabel's father was a man of great wealth, though displeased by her marriage, Mr. Skeemes became quite an enthusiast in her affairs, and while thoughtfully pulling his under lip, a custom he had, said:

"Have no fears, my dear young lady—I'll pull him through," he added, using unconsciously the words of Dr. Clavicle, who "pulled Tom through" the effect of Foxley's other monstrous act of malice; and dashing off a note addressed to "Mr. William Weazle, Scotland Yard," he rose from his desk, to hint that the interview was ended.

Armed with certain instructions and directions from the lawyer, with a heart swollen by the tenderest love and the keenest anxiety, Mabel set out to visit Tom in his prison. On this day her usually gentle eyes wore an expression new to them; it was mournful and wild, half imploring and half defiant, as she turned out of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

As she drew on her gloves they caused her a painful association of ideas; and her mind—in terrible contrast to her present condition and errand—went back to that day twelve months ago, and the occasion on which she won from poor Tom a box of three dozen pairs of $6\frac{1}{2}$, of which this pair, now so carefully darned, were the last; and on this morning she carefully cleaned them with indiarubber.

"A year ago—a year ago!" she muttered. It seemed but

yesterday when she won them, in a bet on the University Boat-race, when she was with a brilliant party, whose hilarity not even the cold March winds that blew over Barnes Common and raised tiny waves at Corney Reach could repress: on that day when every one—gentle and simple, high and low, even to the veriest street-gamin, the cab-driver on his whip, the drayman on his bridle, the costermonger at his donkey's ears—displays a bit of ribbon, light or dark blue, according to his taste or fancy; and when more is thought of the stroke's biceps than the state of the money-market or the fate of nations.

All the scene and those who were with her came back to memory now, even to Milly's Maltèse terrier, which had a dark-blue cockade at his collar—dark blue as Mabel remembered—to tease Rowland Stanley, who had certain jealous thoughts of an Oxford undergraduate.

How much had come to pass since then! Yet poor Mabel did not repine; and this oblivion of all she had relinquished and lost was born of her affection for Tom—*it* was *love*.

As one in a dream she threaded her way afoot till she reached the dreary prison—the dark or smoke-blackened wall she surveyed with haggard eyes, while her heart beat painfully—and presented her name and order to a sulky-looking official clad in a blue livery, with a waistbelt and brass buttons, half policeman and half railway-guard in aspect, who scrutinised her with coldness through a grille like a gridiron, yet not without interest.

Her cheeks were blanched and pale, her eyes red with tears that started to them afresh as she heard bolt after bolt withdrawn, chain after chain fall, and lock after lock undone, and then secured again behind her. Her heart beat more wildly; every pulsation became a throb of pain; so great was her mingled sense of sorrow, misery, and most unmerited shame, that she seemed to *hear* every throb in her bosom; and the whole prison, with its whitewashed corridors, archways, stairs, and passages, seemed to her overstrained mind like those mysterious places we wander through in perturbed dreams, and also like one vast complicated lock, which barred in her husband from the sunshine and the busy world without.

"Number seventy's girl has come to see him!" she heard a

voice say. Even Tom's name had been taken from him in these realms of gloom, and he was reduced to a number.

"His wife, is she?" she heard another say.

"So they all say. She 'as her marriage lines, I daresay; but it ain't no business of ours. Now, then, young woman, you stand here, please."

And heedless of their unintended insolence—her heart having "sunk too low for special woe"—she paused mechanically at a grating in an archway, beyond which appeared another grating about ten feet distant, with a warder seated on a wooden seat between.

Ere this Tom had undergone all the degradation to which prison-rules had subjected the untried prisoner, for he was committed on a charge of felony—committed without bail being accepted.

He had undergone the horror of being brought thither in the van, handcuffed, though he had no more idea of escaping than of flying; he had been weighed, and his weight entered in a book—a silly process, that only seemed to hint that he was becoming less and less the lord of his own proper person; his handsome brown moustache had been shaved off, and his hair shorn ridiculously close. He was clothed in a coarse prison attire of blue woollen, on which were sewn the three enigmatical letters F.N.L., signifying, "First offence—no labour;" yet he had been daily compelled, under the threat of bread and water, to clean his own cell, make his own bed, and so forth; though no threats were necessary, as the gentle fellow meekly obeyed every rule, even to eating his humble food with a wooden spoon—the use of knives and forks being denied him.

A horrible sense of the unreality of his present life haunted Tom, till he feared at times that insanity might supervene. Where was he now? Where was his past existence? where Mabel? where his daily office routine? Was he actually sinking into that character for which they had weighed, shaved, shorn, and attired him?

Tom cared little for his own future, and scarcely felt or cared for the disgrace of the allegation against him. All minor emotions were merged and forgotten in his woe and affliction for Mabel, and all that she must suffer and endure

alone in that dull boarding-house, every detail of which was photographed on his mind, and which he knew not as yet that she had quitted.

Mab—his own darling Mab; it was her *nom de caresse* now. But to return to her.

At the grating beyond that which barred her farther progress, in the gray uncertain light, she suddenly saw an apparition appear, the bearing of Tom, yet was otherwise every way unlike him—shaved, shorn, attired in prison blue, and looking pale and wan.

"Mabel—Mabel!" he exclaimed.

"O God! Tom—Tom—Tom!" she wailed out; and then the young husband and wife involuntarily thrust their arms towards each other through the iron gratings, and Mabel beat her tender breast upon the bars in the veriest despair, while she became so blinded by the gush and the bitterness of her tears that the blurred outline of him she had come to see became quite indistinct. She could hear his voice, but could scarcely understand what he was saying to her.

Then, after a time, she became aware of the presence of the sentinel-warder, midway between the gratings, who sat stolidly looking at her; he was too well used to meetings such as these to feel the slightest interest in them, though they might tickle his sense of humour at times.

Tom was begging and praying her to abstain from visiting him in a place and under circumstances that must harrow all her better and tender feelings, that though he loved her beyond the breath that was in his nostrils he would rather not see her there, as he could always hear of her through Mr. Skeemes, who had access to him at all times.

She wiped her tears that she might see him she loved clearly and steadily; and Tom looked wistfully into her face—that soft, fair, and exquisite English face, so beautiful even then at that dire, dire moment, filled with the sudden brightness and gladness of divine hope, and the trust, as she assured him, that all would yet be well with them, for they had done no wrong, save her disobedience to her parents. Mr. Skeemes, she added, had come to the conviction that Foxley, and no other, was the perpetrator of the crime, and means would be taken to unmask him.

It never occurred to Mabel that he might have concealed, destroyed, or put the notes in circulation, or that he might be —as he actually was at that time—on the Continent, and hidden beyond the reach even of extradition laws; for the gentle girl had all that sublime hope in the future and that earnest piety which form the best "of the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit of God."

He then asked her if she had heard aught of her father and mother.

"Alas, no, Tom," she replied, clasping her hands, at that time ignorant of the former's visit, of the fever of his mind, and that she had gone from Harley Street without leaving any address.

Tom was about to speak again, when the Cerberus in the blue surtout posted between the gratings suddenly produced a huge metal watch, and bluntly announcing that time was "up," warned her to be gone, and Tom to retire; so husband and wife could but exchange one more despairing glance, stretch out their trembling hands towards each other, and separate.

Again there was a dreadful clanging of bolts and bars, a rattling of chains, and Mabel, as one still in a dreadful dream, found herself once more in the busy human sea that surged around the prison walls.

In her loneliness and misery, Mabel had thought many times of casting herself on the mercy of her parents; but she had a terror of her mother's reproaches and of the dreadful epithets she would be sure now to hurl against Tom in the hour of his humiliation; besides, she, in her ignorance of the world and of life, had a fear that if they sought to serve him by means of their wealth and influence, the price of it might be her separation from him for ever. Yet if Tom was to be defended when the time of trial came, money was most necessary; and whence was it to come?

But for the lack of it he might be found guilty, and then—oh, no, no! God could not be so cruel! So she thrust the idea from her; but it would recur to her stingingly, again and again.

It was well for Mabel, as full of thought she walked slowly and dreamily homeward to the humble lodging she

had selected, that she knew not the state of mind in which she left Tom Seymour. Instead of soothing him, the sight of Mabel, her tears and the piteous sound of her voice, had inspired him with a species of frenzy.

She was scarcely gone ere he returned and shrieked her name aloud. He dashed himself, again and again, upon the solid iron grating; he grasped the bars like a madman, and shook them till, massive as they were, they actually rattled in their sockets; but they mocked his feeble strength. He then flung himself against the solid walls; and in his fury might have done himself some serious injury, had not half-a-dozen strong warders borne him off by main strength to his cell and flung him on his pallet, where, after the paroxysm passed away, he wrung his hands and wept like a child.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

### SORROW AND JOY.

DAILY Mabel haunted the vicinity of the prison till she knew every stone in the abhorred walls, every rusty bar in its grimy little windows of fluted glass, and more than once was somewhat roughly and suspiciously questioned by the watchful police as to her purpose in loitering there, till she became terrified, and when she was without permission to visit Tom could only watch his dreary abode from a distance.

Daily also was she at the dingy little office of Mr. Skeemes to learn what progress was being made in the preparation for Tom's defence, for evidence in the matter of Foxley's visit and the prospect of Tom being speedily tried—and if his prosecution was to be conducted by the Treasury.

"O heavens!" thought she; "my slender purse against the Treasury!" and the poor girl's soul would seem to die away within her. But when questioned by her—tearfully nervously, and while growing haggard with anxiety—the tiresome lawyer would wrap himself up in mystery, pull his nether lip, as if full of grave doubts, use a jargon of horrible legal phrases of which she could make nothing, and, save a few dry commonplaces, nothing ever fell from him to soothe the beating heart of her who hung in agony on his measured and monotonous accents.

At last the poor girl learned, with a thrill in which hope and horror were blended, that the day for Tom's trial was FIXED, and that an able counsel for the defence would be wanted. On obtaining these tidings, when she returned to her lodging, in a humble, gloomy, and very dirty alley, she looked so crushed in spirit, so wan in face, so ill and feverish in spirit, that even her landlady, a struggling woman, accustomed ever and always to look at the darker side of life, was sorrowful for the stricken creature, though she seemed to take misfortune, and even shame, but as the component parts of the hard game of existence.

"If she is hill," Mabel overheard her say to a neighbour, over a cup of tea that never saw China, sweetened with sugar that was half Derbyshire white, "I 'opes it ain't with anything catching; if so, to a 'ospital she must go, as I can't keep her on all I am likely to get from her 'usband, or the man she calls sich. I can't make her out at all, ma'am; her hands is so white and delicat. She has never done no work, even needlework, for there ain't no marks in her forefinger."

To have such things said to or of her, the pride of Thaneshurst, the once pet of her father and joy of his life!

With Tom's arrest, of course, his salary ceased; and save the contents of her trunk Mabel's means of subsistence were gone. Thus, one by one, the few jewels and birthday presents she had brought from h me with her, or acquired since out of Tom's limited means, were parted with to jewellers in the Strand, and once more the weary pilgrimages were resumed among the picture-dealers and music-shops—the former to seek sale for the drawings, the latter to obtain employment, even to play at balls and parties; but of this last she had less hope than ever now. A married woman! Where was her husband? She dared not say in prison, awaiting his trial for embezzling public money. While her attire was daily becoming more sordid, even the neat paper-cuffs and collars with which—to wear real linen had become too expensive—the poor girl sought to set off her turned silk dress, had to be relinquished, and the pretty figure did then begin to look so dark and dingy.

Times there were when she thought all this must be portion of a punishment put upon her for acting ungratefully

to her parents, and abandoning them for the love of Tom. But Tom was so tender and true, so loving to her, that surely they—even her mamma, so pitilessly harsh and stern—would relent.

She felt herself, under this daily and nightly load of galling anxiety, growing feeble, she knew not exactly how. She had headaches, dimness of eyesight, and a tendency to faint. The cheap and dubious medicines she got from a shabby apothecary's shop at the street-corner failed to benefit her, and dreadful were the fears at times that came over her, lest she should actually become ill—for she remembered the words of the landlady—and be removed to some hospital, where she might die without seeing Tom again; and of such places she had only vague horrors associated with suffering, death, coroners' inquests, dissections, and experimenting students—"sprigs of anatomy, plaster, and pills."

And she shuddered at her own thoughts. Every visit she paid Tom was but a wild repetition of the first, and the excitement of these increased as the day of trial drew near.

Her girlish bloom was gone now, and much of her rose-beauty had faded away; hence, when on her sad and hopeless errands, though many men noticed, none addressed or molested her, she looked so modest, humble, and yet so ladylike, albeit she was so poorly attired.

She became morbid at last, by brooding and loneliness. Thus once, on seeing Milly Allingham and her mamma bowling along Oxford Street in a well-hung carriage, a little cry as of fear escaped her, lest she should be seen by them so shabbily attired, and she shrunk aside into the porch of the Soho Bazaar, and lingered there irresolutely, till the stern and inquiring eye of the porter, who saw that she had evidently no intention of becoming a purchaser, drove her once more into the crowded street. But she acted most unwisely in thus studiously avoiding the generous Milly—the one link between her and those at Thaneshurst.

At this—to her most critical—juncture a Bermuda letter came from Rowland Stanley, enclosing a draft on his London bankers for a good round sum, saying, it was a small present for the little one, whose birth he had seen in the papers (but of whose death he happened to be ignorant); and Mabel

wept as she kissed and placed in her breast the letter of the generous soldier who was her husband's faithful friend, and who thus furnished the means for his defence, in blessed ignorance that it was required for such a purpose.

For the first time after this event Tom and Mabel talked with something like coherence through the odious double gratings that separated them.

"O Mabel," said he, "what a difference there is between having a heavy heart and a light pocket, a heavy pocket and a light heart, in this world! God bless Stanley for all his kindness!"

She could only weep.

"How shall I ever repay him!" added Tom. "You must write to him, darling—for, you know, I cannot."

And Mabel after some days wrote; but too late, for when her letter reached Bermuda H.M.'s gallant —th regiment was sailing on the sea. To the luckless, the unfortunate, and the crushed there can be no happier temperament than one that builds *châteaux en Espagne.* It may be dreamy, vain, and speculative, but not quite useless, as it is based on the sweet sentiment of *hope*, after all. So Tom built his castles nobly for a time; but another time came, when those airy creations—too often the last resource of the miserable—ceased to interest him or the poor little wife, whose faded face could no longer nestle in his neck.

He had now, he knew, the stern and degrading anxieties of his trial to face; and Heaven alone could foresee whether he should come off triumphant, or be hurled still farther and more hopelessly than ever down the ladder of social life.

And now to turn to a brighter picture.

Great joy was Milly's now; her reconciliation with Stanley had lifted an incubus off her heart.

"O mamma," said she, as they drove westward, "do you know, I thought I saw the face of Mabel Brooke just now in Oxford Street. If 'twas she, how pale and worn she looked! Perhaps I was mistaken, and I hope so."

"A naughty, foolish, and worse than foolish girl," responded Mrs. Allingham; "don't talk of her."

"O mamma!" urged Milly, as at the foot of Park Lane

the coachman checked his horses, and looked round inquiringly.

"Once round by the Row, and then home, to be in time for afternoon tea," said Mrs. Allingham; and so her handsome carriage swept round by the noble equestrian promenade which is adjacent to those hideous barracks at Knightsbridge, and is, as most people in cockneydom know, a corruption of the *Route du Roi* of England's Norman kings, and from which people were whilom debarred when surly William of Orange—he of the pious, glorious, and immortal memory—attended by only some Dutch favourites and his one-eyed mistress, the ugly Elizabeth Villars, Countess of Orkney, were wont to ride in solemn state, escorted by Count Solms's Blues, the Dutch Life-guards whom he adored.

All was dull and silent in the Row at this season and on that day, as if those old times had come again; but Milly Allingham was in the highest spirits, nathless the little pale face that haunted her. Mabel had thought her friend—as the carriage swept past—looking more beautiful, and certainly more radiant, than ever; and, indeed, she was in such a flow of spirits as puzzled her mamma, who was as yet totally ignorant of her engagement to Stanley (whose letters were all that Milly could have desired), till one day the bewildered old lady had put into her hand an enclosure for her daughter in a strange handwriting.

It bore the Bermuda postmark, and on the envelope, in radiant blue, red, and gold, were the number of a regiment, with the royal cipher and crown.

"For me, mamma?" said Milly, colouring deeply.

"*What* is this? and *who* is your correspondent now?" asked Mrs. Allingham severely.

"Don't say *now*, mamma; that is too severe," said Milly, her colour deepening, as they sat in the exquisitely furnished boudoir in Connaught Place—where the fragrance of the sweet-peas and of the mignonette came in together from the jardinière at the open windows facing the Park—and when she threw her arms round her startled mother's neck—startled all the more because such exhibitions were unusual in the rather placid Milly—and said, "Forgive me, darling mamma; but I am solemnly engaged—"

"To whom—to whom?"

"Captain Stanley—Rowland Stanley. You must remember him last season, mamma."

Mrs. Allingham did remember him, and had liked him immensely—the cunning fellow had ever been so attentive to herself.

"But this announcement is somewhat sudden," she said, with perfectly pardonable severity. "You are a second Mabel Brooke, or Seymour, or whatever she calls herself now. Surely I, your mother, should have been consulted in a matter of so much importance as your marriage—your settlement in life."

Nestling her face in the plump white neck of the old lady (for her mamma was still handsome, and no one would have guessed her real age), with an arm thrown around her, and with all that caressing and endearing manner of which Miss Mildred Stanhope Allingham was perfectly mistress, she then told her mamma much of which that good lady had been quite ignorant: her two proposals— one made in the next drawing-room, the other at Thaneshurst—and the final and fatal, though pretty, affair of the flower at Brighton, and the horror of the subsequent shipwreck.

"Who could think," she added plaintively, "that so much of fate, so much of sorrow and of joy, could be bound up in the petals of a white camellia? It is quite like some of Mudie's stories, or those people who write for Mudie. And, O mamma, but for Rowland's suspicion, haste, and impetuosity on that night, three words would have explained all; all would have been well, and many a bitter tear shed, unknown to you, when I was alone, especially in the silence of night, had never, never been; and our hearts had never been so nearly broken—if hearts do really break," she added, with a coy and covert smile.

"But you should have told and trusted *me*," persisted the old lady.

"I meant to let Rowland do so, mamma," urged the winning delinquent.

That the hitherto butterfly existence of her daughter was, too probably, now approaching its termination gave Mrs. Allingham occasion for much thought and reflection; and so far as family, position, means, and general character went, Stanley she knew to be every way, as her French maid would have expressed it, *un parti* that was unexceptionable.

After many questions asked and answers given, with long pauses full of natural thought between—for in this instance mother and daughter were most tenderly attached—Mrs. Allingham said,

"O my Milly, how can I ever make up my mind to lose you!"

"But you shall not lose me, dearest mamma."

"With a husband whose regiment—"

"He will leave that, I know. We shall have a nice house in Sussex Gardens, or some such quiet place; and you will live with us, mamma; and, oh, we shall be so happy together, you dear, dear old thing!"

Then the old lady's fine clear eyes filled with tears as she caressed her winning and beautiful daughter, and said,

"I always liked Rowland Stanley, Milly."

"So glad of that, darling; he is the dearest fellow in the world; but, O mamma, I used him shamefully!"

"You have used a good many so, I fear. There was," began the old lady, counting on her white but now wrinkled fingers, "the Hon. Mr. Hampton, from whom you took a ring, and then returned it next day."

"He quarrelled with me because I happened to ride along the Uxbridge Road with the Master of Badenoch, when the Hussars were at Hounslow, and who was going the same way. Oh, *his* jealousy was quite intolerable!"

"Then there was Val Reynolds."

"Nonsense, mamma; he never proposed."

"Next there was Sir Henry."

"Old Sir Henry was always too good and proper for me—always considered me giddy and undignified; I was so glad to be rid of him. But please, mamma, do not enumerate all the bores who have bored me."

"When is the —th Regiment expected home?"

"In Europe very, very soon."

"All the better for Captain Stanley's sake," said Mrs. Allingham, laughing.

"O mamma, don't quiz me. You do not know how truly good, tender, and true our Rowland is—for he is *ours*, you know, mamma," added the girl, her dark eyes full of tears; "and do think," she added, with much of her old coquetry "that a man's pride is, or ought to be, flattered by witnessing the world's appreciation of his choice."

And in girlish glee her Maltese terrier, a snow-white cur presented to her by Stanley, was tossed up and kissed again and again, for the donor's sake. How well she remembered the day when he bought it for her in Leadenhall Market, and the fun they had while the carriage waited for them in Gracechurch Street!

But to do her justice, in the brilliance of her joy Milly had but one sensation of oppression—the fate and misfortunes of the unhappy Seymours. She knew nothing of Mr. Skeemes, and thus could nowhere discover Mabel's address, as at Harley Street all trace of her had been lost. Occasionally she thought of advertising in the *Times*; but remembering how the "agony-column" thereof was alternately a source of curiosity and contempt, she shrank from the idea, as being unladylike. So day followed day; the Brookes secluded themselves at Thaneshurst; Mabel's name was ignored in their letters; and Milly, in her kindness of heart, watched unwearyingly the human tides that passed on each side of the carriage for the sweet face of her she loved so well; but watched in vain.

## CHAPTER XLV.

### ADIEU, BERMUDA!

AT the very time the interview we have narrated was taking place in that pretty boudoir in Connaught Place between Milly Allingham and her mother, a large steam transport, with H.M.'s —th on board, was slowly getting out of Grassy Bay, and from the deck the soldiers were waving their farewell cheers to those by whom they had been relieved, and were gathered in crowds responding, yet watching the lessening ship, from the dockyard in Ireland Island. They soon melted away from sight, and then the rocky and conical hills of the sunny isles began to sink into the evening sea astern.

Stanley's regiment had been ordered to Gibraltar; and all the important business of seeing that each soldier had one bag in lieu of a haversack, a half-pound of soap, one tintot, and a half-pound of tobacco—in all, value 3*s.* 5½*d.*, *most generous* John Bull!—was over.

The evening was a lovely and auspicious one, shedding a

long line of light along the rippling path the ship had to traverse; the moon rose into the starry sky without a cloud, and, as all on board remarked with pleasure, without a vestige of that luminous halo, or circle, which in those regions is always the precursor of a storm, and often of a hurricane.

Nearly all the regimental officers were on deck, chiefly aft; thus a heavy odour of cigars and meerschaums was on the air. All were gay and in the highest spirits; so chaff and banter —in all instances not restrained even by the presence of a few married ladies, shawled and cloaked—were in full swing; and forward, the cheery voices of the soldiers, with often a chorus or two, stole out upon the night, for the tattoo-drum had not been beaten, warning all, save the watch, to go below and turn in.

"Well, Neddy," said Joe Trevor, a young sub., who "went in" for being regimental funmaker, "how did you like the text of the chaplain's farewell sermon yesterday?"

"'All flesh is grass'—very well."

"Ah, it made you think of the little grass widow at Hampton—eh?"

Knollys put his arm through Stanley's arm, and turned angrily on his heel towards the taffrail; and more angry might he have been with Master Joe Trevor, but it so chanced that on this evening, save Stanley's, there was no heart so light in all the crowded ship as his; for two days before the departure of the regiment the last mail from England had brought him a black-edged, highly embossed, and every way most impressive card: "In Memoriam — Colonel John Hippisley, K.C.B., who departed this life at the mansion of the Chestnuts, near Hampton Court," &c.; and of this important piece of pasteboard Stanley had instantly been made cognisant; so he ordered a bottle of champagne from the mess house, to sustain Neddy under the effects of this second demise of his cousin's *caro sposo*.

So the brilliant Kate was a widow in earnest *again*, as Paddy might say, and there would be no more returning from the other world, to all appearance, as upon that exciting moonlight night in the arbour.

"Trevor—how the devil has he got hold of the story! Little knows he, Rowland, what the affair he jests of cost

me," said Knollys; "but I am sure that, as some fellows say:

> 'Tis better to have loved and lost
> Than never to have loved at all.'

"Yes, but more especially, Neddy, when you go on loving the girl with the assurance that she loves you; but," added Stanley, laughing, "you'll have to make sure this time—see even his tombstone."

"Won't I, by Jove!" replied Knollys, in the same tone. "I'll search the register like a lawyer—see even the undertaker's receipt. As for a tombstone, that is nothing; I believe the old fellow quite capable of putting up one to himself, don't you know."

Perhaps this was scarcely the kind of manner to adopt; but then it must be borne in mind that Knollys was young and heedless, and considered that the late gallant colonel had acted most improperly to his cousin and himself by the eccentric prank he had so skilfully played them.

"Make sure!" he said, after a time; "I rather think I shall. Poor darling Kate, how much *she* must have endured all this time!"

"You have been in general jolly enough, my friend, seeking 'the bubble reputation,' and not always at the cannon's mouth."

"At a mouth more pleasant perhaps; but you know, Stanley, that yonder among the demi-semi-coloured lot in 'vexed Bermoothes' we are apt to forget——"

"Especially in private theatricals and fancy-balls."

"Exactly who are married and who are not. The route came just in time to save Trevor and some more of us from coming to grief. And now we are off for home," exclaimed Knollys, but added a little pathetically, "I say *home*, though I have none but where the regimental colours are. The corps has been my happy movable home since infancy, for I was, as you know, born in it, like my father and grandfather; and the services of the last go back to the wars of Cornwallis and the fall of York Town. That wasn't yesterday, old fellow. So I have no other home than the regiment, God bless me, unless—unless——"

"What?"

"My cousin Kate, now that she is a widow, marries me," he added, with such simplicity that Stanley burst into a fit of laughter, and said:

"Can you doubt it?"

"Not for a second," replied the other, twirling his smart brown moustache into spiky points. "Off at last for England—or Gib.; it is nearly all one now; they are only a week's run, or less, apart. By Jove, Rowland, I have never been so happy since I was appointed, and the circulars of the military snips came pouring in, to the disgust of the governor, but the joy of my mother and my sisters, who thought that in a forsage-cap and tight shell-jacket I should look like Mars or Hector. Indeed, I had but few doubts on that subject myself."

While Neddy Knollys, in his unwonted flow of spirits, ran on thus by the side of Stanley, the latter—more like a sailor than a soldier at sea—was pacing steadily up and down, doing the Dutchman's walk of "three steps and overboard," a practice men acquire on long voyages, and he had performed many; he thinking of the mood of mind in which he last crossed that world of waters, and the change that Milly's letter had wrought upon him, and feeling now that to look forward to the future was to have the heart filled indeed with the light and joy of hope. Stanley and Knollys had become as confidential to each other on the subject of their loves as two schoolboys, and the latter knew all ere long about Milly and her letters, as if he had known her since she was in short frocks. In their jollity they tossed up for who was to enact the part of groomsman to the other, and Neddy won the post.

But, like the Irish Gil Blas, "his mind had laid up so many texts for adventurous fancies, that on the slightest pretext he could call up any quantity for enterprises and vicissitudes."

The steamer sped fast into other latitudes and longitudes, far northward and eastward of the Bermudas. The voyage was prosperous, and varied only by the really trivial events that prove such excitement at sea, and the fulfilment of her Majesty's instructions for troops when on board ship,—the

parades on deck, the clean-shirt days, the messing, and change of the watches and quarter-guard; the bedding, fumigation, and ventilation below; the state of the well and of the orlop deck; all of which were duly and daily reported on in writing to the colonel by the captain and subaltern of the day,—till one fine morning when the look-out man at the mainmast head announced "Land on the starboard bow!" and every soldier and sailor came swarming up from below to see a low stripe rising from the sea; and that stripe proved to be—for the Madeiras had long since disappeared upon the port-quarter—Cape Blanco, the most western point of the vast continent of Africa.

Every glass was soon brought to bear upon it, and a few hours' further run showed it to be a high white cliff, rising with a gentle slope from the water-edge; but it melted away astern as the transport hauled up for the Gut of Gibraltar and the point of Tangiers, which were more than two hundred miles distant. But already the cheerful voice of the deck-watch, sailors and soldiers mingled, were heard on the forecastle, where, under one of the mates, the "ground tackle" was got ready, the rattling chain-cable laid in "French fake" along the deck, and the ponderous anchors were raised over the bows to dangle at the cat-heads.

Ere long the peculiar outline of old Gib., like a couchant lion, was seen rising from the sea on the starboard bow; and a few hours after, the mighty batteries, the lines of caverns with their round black portholes hewn through the solid rock, and all the details of the wonderful fortress, became distinct to the eye.

Stanley and others of the regiment had seen Gibraltar twice before, when going to and returning from India; consequently it was scarcely a source of excitement to him or them. But none of them had ever approached it from the south-western portion of the Atlantic, the point whence can be seen the vast promontory, running into the sea for several miles from the continent of Spain, with which it is connected by a low sandy isthmus, doubtless once covered by the ocean, from which the rock starts abruptly upward to the height of thirteen hundred feet. There the sea-birds and the wild hawks wheel and scream amid the boom of the white breakers;

there the olive, the cacti, and the caper plant grow in the clefts of the cliff, and there the wild apes scamper to and fro. On the other side, at the foot, lies the town, and high over it, tier on tier, the most tremendous fortifications in the world; and there can be heard the British drum and the Scottish bagpipe, daily waking the echoes of the same rocks where the warriors of Tarik the Moor sounded their timbrels and sent up their war-cries in the eighth century.

Stanley's regiment bore on its colours *Montis Insignia Calpe*, with the Castle and Key; for it had served in the famous three years' siege under stout old General Eliott, and was engaged in the great sortie on that terrible night, the 26th November 1781, when the countersign was "Steady," and the supports were led by Picton—the gallant Picton of the wars of future years.

And Stanley thought of the lines, as the great screw-propeller drew nearer and nearer the scene of his destination:

"Through Calpe's straits survey the steepy shore—
Europe and Afric on each other gaze!
Lands of the dark-eyed maid and dusky Moor
Alike beheld beneath pale Hecate's blaze.
How softly on the Spanish shore she plays,
Disclosing the rock and slope and forest brown,
Distinct, though darkening with her waning phase;
Mauritania's giant shadows frown
From mountain cliff to coast descending sombre brown."

"I wonder what we Englishmen or Scotchmen would think," said Knollys, "if we saw a fortress such as this tenanted by Spaniards or Frenchmen, looking down from the cliffs of Dover or on the Firth of Forth."

"In either case it would cut off nothing," said Stanley.

"How so?"

"Because Gibraltar most effectually cuts off all communication by sea between that part of Spain which is bounded by the Mediterranean and that portion which is bordered by the Atlantic; and by its heavy guns, even in these days of steam, it effectually bars the passage of the strait against the world; so those cosmopolitans who urge its surrender are either fools or knaves, or both."

At last the anchors were let go with a mighty plunge; the cables rushed through iron hawse-pipes with a sullen roar,

the canvas was hauled up, the light evening breeze swept through the rigging, and the transport swung at her moorings under the dark shadow of the mighty rock.

The Custom-house authorities came, of course, on board; then the staff and medical officers, to ascertain the actual state of the troops on board, what casualties had occurred on the voyage, and many other matters of routine.

Amid all this Stanley had but one thought. Was a letter from Milly awaiting him in yonder tremendous fortress that overhung the sea?

The next day's early dawn saw all our "gallant friends" ashore, and marching into the garrison by the *Mouth of Fire*, as the entrance is named by the Spaniards, so formidable is the appearance exhibited by the ordnance on the lines, on the grand battery and the old mole. Then the corps they had come to relieve, like themselves, were all in heavy marching order, departing to embark; and then amid the mingled crash of two strong regimental bands ensued one of those striking scenes which spring from the chivalrous etiquette of military life.

The departing regiment, being a junior one, was formed in two ranks, facing inwards, with presented arms, the colours flying, the officers in front saluting, while Stanley's corps marched between these in sections, also with colours flying, but arms carried. Then the ranks were closed, a farewell cheer exchanged, and the departing regiment resumed its march, to embark for Malta.

Stanley and his friend Knollys were both in a fever of impatience, till they were duly rewarded by the arrival of the letters for the regiment; and the same tall bugle-major who brought the former Milly's welcome letter at Bermuda again, *ex officio*, brought him another at old Gib., together with a little packet—"that angel of a bugle-major!" as Neddy called him in fervour, as the stolid non-commissioned officer had something pleasant for him (postmark—Hampton Court). But Stanley's packet—what might it contain?

He was not long in discovering. A delicately but magnificently coloured photo—the best that Regent Street could produce—of Milly herself, in a blue velvet case.

Long and ardently did he gaze upon it, again and again.

How the eyes seemed to smile—and on *him*—the sweet lips to move, the soft features to become instinct with subtle life! How often had he seen her posed thus, look thus, and with her hair thus dressed! It was Milly Allingham—his own Milly to be—to the very life. No artist's eye or hand could have produced the exquisite and perfect proportion of feature and of form given to this delicately tinted sun-picture.

Neither of our enamoured friends of Gibraltar could, as yet, obtain leave of absence, even between returns—*i.e.* for a month—so many seniors had applied for the same, and had of course priority; so they were compelled, as Knollys said, "to kick their heels in Gibraltar, and cultivate the art of patience."

Young men soon use up all the amusements of such a place as Gibraltar when a strong garrison occupy a space so circumscribed. Balls, parties, amateur theatricals, and some very break-neck hunting over stony and marvellous ground were all resorted to by them to kill the time, and a very short period sufficed them to "do" all the rock, and even a portion of Andalusia when leave could be had to cross the lines of the jealous Spaniards at San Roque: and in anticipation of their meeting, many a sketch Stanley made for Milly of views from "the lightning-riven tower of O'Hara" of the opposite continent, where rise the other Pillar of Hercules and the dark cliffs of Mount Abyla, the deep bay of Tetuan, and the snow-covered chain of Mount Atlas, stretching in dim perspective far away; or on other points, where rose the mountain coast of Marbella and Estepona, and the masses of the Serrania de Ronda aspiring to heaven.

What joy he should feel when hanging over Milly and describing to her all these places and the old Moorish tower of the Caliph Walid, which, like a war-worn sentinel, seems to guard the gloomy gorge that leads into the bosom of the rocky mountain!

He often wandered alone in those galleries or natural casemates hewn in the living rock, and through the portholes of which there steals a dubious light on heavy ordnance, on piles of balls and bombs. There would he linger for many an hour listening to the music of breakers far down below, or the shrill voices from the town borne upward on the ambient

air, and think how delighted he should be were *she* but with him there, to watch the ships, often passing out of the straits before a stiff Levanter, and seeming to fly as they carried the sea and wind alike with them.

He had sent Milly a bracelet of Gibraltar stones, set in gold by the best jeweller in the town, and he had dutifully written to her mother, saying all that was necessary, referring her to his lawyers, and so forth—for even in the affairs of love must these cold-blooded functionaries interfere at times—and urging that Milly might be his wife before the year closed in, adding that if leave were delayed him, he should certainly send in his papers and sell out.

With such a correspondence as this on hand, the periodical arrival of the English mail was a source of endless interest; and between these and the intervals of military duty he could but kill time in the ways described, or wander in the Alameda, that beautiful square esplanade which rises above the batteries, and is shaded by trees, and where, like all other young fellows in the garrison, he knew every pretty girl—at least by sight—English, Spanish, and Jewish.

At last, to the sore perplexity of Stanley, *three* successive mails arrived without a single letter for him from either Mrs. Allingham or Milly, and he grew feverish with impatience, anxiety, and even fear.

Had she changed her mind again? Had other or more brilliant prospects come before her? Was illness the cause of her silence? A thousand things he thought of to torment himself and a thousand more.

He telegraphed to Connaught Place in London, but received no reply. This still further increased his bewilderment. After a time he learned that a letter addressed to him by Mrs. Allingham had miscarried—a letter that would have explained all he could have wished to learn, and the cause of the mysterious silence, the reason of which was simply this—that she and Milly were sailing on the sea.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

### MR. WILLIAM WEAZLE.

HEEDLESS of the grief and horror he had brought among his family circle at home, and half oblivious of the danger accruing to himself by the sudden manner in which he had been tempted to indulge his spirit of treachery and revenge, Alf Foxley was now at that most dissipated of all the German spas, Homburg, enjoying all the luxuries afforded by the Hôtel d'Angleterre, refreshing his inward man by copious matutinal draughts of the Stahl Brunnen, and having nightly the run of the ball, dining, coffee, and smoking rooms of the splendid Kurhaus, together with more than one rather disreputable flirtation in the beautiful gardens and pleasure-grounds attached to the Schloss of Hesse Homburg, or having evening rides in the long avenue of stately Lombardy poplars; while at this time his uncle and aunt supposed him to be idling in London.

It was one of those hot and breathless days that are among the last of summer. All the country—tree, wood, and wold—around Thaneshurst seemed to quiver and vibrate in the breathless sunshine, and swarms of little flies and gnats were dancing in the air—when the panting cattle chew the cud under the shadiest oaks and beeches, and the careful driver takes his horses through every pond or running stream, to freshen them up a little.

Breakfast was over, and Mr. and Mrs. Brooke were seated together in the morning-room, but in silence, for the *one* solitary topic on which they cared to converse had been worn utterly threadbare now.

Mr. Brooke had advertised again and again in the second column of the *Times* for Mabel, under the initials "M. B., now M. S.," but without success; for no answer or response ever came, for Mabel never saw that paper now; and Milly Allingham, who knew but too surely to *whom* the initials referred, was filled by them with affectionate sorrow and alarm.

The two old people sat in silence, Mrs. Brooke idly rolling and unrolling her table-napkin, scarcely conscious of what she was doing; and Mr. Brooke, a man of one sorrowful thought, was brooding, as he always brooded now; his ample chin, or

succession of chins, now become more thin and pendulous, sunk on his breast, his fingers interlaced before him, and his thumbs revolving over each other in succession. His eyes were fixed on the distant landscape, but vacantly, for he neither saw nor heeded it.

At this time a violent peal of the bell, the great handle of which hung in the *porte-cochère*, resounded through the whole house, and made Mr. and Mrs. Brooke start from their mutual reverie to gaze at each other inquiringly. No visitor, having a view to propriety or etiquette, ever called at such an early hour, either in town or country ; so *who* could the arrival be?

Mr. Mulbery, with a slightly indignant expression of countenance, appeared with a card on a salver, preceding a mean-looking little man,—plainly but respectably dressed, quiet in bearing, keen and watchful, rapid yet unobtrusive in manner,—who entered the room, with his hat in one hand, his other occupied in smoothing down his stiff grizzled hair, while he smiled and bowed alternately to the host and hostess.

Mr. Brooke took up the card as Mulbery withdrew, and read thereon, "MR. WILLIAM WEAZLE."

"May I ask you—but pray, first be seated—what obtains me the pleasure of this visit?" asked Mr. Brooke.

"You may, sir," replied Mr. Weazle, with a grin, which, however, instantly subsided ; while Mrs. Brooke glanced haughtily and inquiringly at their visitor, who sat uneasily on the extreme edge of his chair, with his hat on his knees—"you may, sir," he repeated. "I am a detective officer from Scotland Yard."

"Will you leave us for a little time, Martha dear?" asked Mr. Brooke ; on which she rose, and haughtily, yet with a heart wrung by disgrace and rage, left the room. "And now," said the old gentleman, "may I inquire what your business can be with me?"

"It is a very unpleasant one, sir," said Mr. Weazle, who was certainly rather impressed by the whole aspect of Thaneshurst, and the solid evidence of wealth, luxury, and splendour by which he was surrounded ; yet there were alternations of coolness, fidgets, sarcasm, and *insouciance* in the bearing of this underbred visitor as he gathered confidence, that angered even the easy-going Mr. Brooke, who said rather sharply,

"Will you come to the point, sir?"

"You must excuse me, in the execution of my dooty, asking a few questions."

"Certainly."

"You have a nephew, sir?"

"Yes—Mr. Alfred Foxley."

"Where is he at this time?"

"I do not know—in town; at his club most probably."

"No, sir; he is not at his club."

"How do you know?" asked Mr. Brooke, with irritation and vague uneasiness of manner—a fear in his heart that something more was hanging over them all.

"Letters for him have been lying there for ever so long, and no one knows where to send them to."

"Why?"

"He is supposed to be across the briny," replied Mr. Weazle, winking.

"The what?" asked Mr. Brooke sharply.

"The sea, sir."

"For what reason?"

"The wery identical reason as brought me down here."

"And that is—"

"His supposed implication in the matter of them missing bank-notes."

"God bless my soul! Do you say so?"

"More than say so; I think so. Mr. Seymour admitted, reluctantly I must say, that on the day the money was missed he was visited by your nephew—the man in the gray-coloured dust-coat; and I have come, with your permission, to search his room or rooms for anything that may bear evidence or throw light on this matter. It is all in the execution of my dooty, sir."

"Certainly, certainly," replied Mr. Brooke, who rang for the butler with unconcealed agitation of manner. In all his long experience of life he had been unused to visitors and humiliations of this kind. "Mr. Mulbery," said he, on the appearance of that personage, "take this gentleman to Mr. Foxley's rooms; he wishes to take some note of them."

They retired together, and Mr. Brooke uttered a sigh of impatience rather than relief; and sinking back in his chair,

and gazing at the ceiling, alternately stern and stolid to all appearanee, then restless and fidgety, and deeming, like Mrs. Brooke, that Mr. Weazle's visit was but one chapter more in the awful story, one act more in the drama, of disgrace in which they had so suddenly become involved.

As may be supposed, the bedroom and "snuggery" of Alf Foxley were furnished with every luxury neeessary to baehelorhood. The deteetive, after scanning the exquisite toilette-table in the dressing-room, the mantelpieee littered with pipes, notes, odds and ends of cigars, eartes of Aimée in every speeies of eostume and variety of pose, turned his attention to the ehest of drawers and wardrobe, with its plate-mirror panelling. All were securely locked, but Mr. Weazle thought nothing of that; and simply requesting that a smith should be sent for from the village, seated himself in Alf's easy-ehair with the air of a man who made himself thoroughly at home everywhere. He then made some remarks upon the heat of the weather, and its consequent provocation to thirst.

The butler was not slow in taking the hint, and speedily produeed a deeanter and couple of glasses on a silver tray. He filled up the latter, and Mr. Weazle sniffed, sipped the wine, and then eyed it between him and the light with the would-be air of a eonnoisseur.

"Mr. Bulbery," he began.

"Mulbery, sir."

"Well, there ain't much differenee, is there?"

"The differenee of a B and a Hem," replied Mulbery, coldly.

"Well, what do you call this—cream o' the walley, I suppose? Another glass, please."

"We ealls it burgundy, sir."

"Oh, burgundy."

"It is not exactly the wine for this hour of the day; but what do you think of it?"

"That it ain't—exeuse me—got much body in it; leastways not like the burgundy I am used to. But just another glass, Mr. Bul—beg pardon—Mulbery, and then to business; for here is the locksmith," he added, as a grimy man, with a handful of tools and a rather scared expression of face, was ushered into the room.

"Open the locks of them drawers and this here wardrobe," said Mr. Weazle, with an air of authority; and the smith, with a nervousness that caused some delay, set about the task. Meanwhile Mr. Weazle filled up the time by imbibing another glass of wine, and remarked in a low voice to Mulbery, who was eyeing him and his unusual proceedings with mingled distrust and disdain:

"Is it true that the old gent's daughter ran away with the young fellow that is in quod for them missing notes?"

"No, sir," replied Mulbery sharply, and colouring for the honour of the family.

"No! What then?"

"He ran away with her, and she was privately married to him—to Mr. Thomas Seymour," replied honest Mulbery, who loved Mabel dearly, and resented every slighting remark regarding her.

"A love match regular, eh?"

"Yes; and no wonder."

"Why?"

"Such a sweet young lady she is."

"Ah, but such things never turn out well, do they, Mulbery?"

Mr. Mulbery grimly drew up his shirt-collar, but made no response. There were bounds to familiarity, he thought.

The drawers proved nearly empty, yet Mr. Weazle turned them out and inspected narrowly all they contained, looking behind each to see if aught was concealed, or by chance had dropped there; but nothing of consequence was found. The wardrobe contained but some heavy winter overcoats, shooting and hunting garments, the pockets of which he examined in vain. He then mounted a table to inspect the top uselessly. He had the wardrobe drawn from the wall; there was nothing behind. Once again he turned to inspect a long drawer at the base; it was quite empty. Suddenly a snort of satisfaction escaped him: and drawing forth an ivory foot-rule, he applied it without and within the drawer, and found the latter measurement four inches less than that on the outside.

He rattled it with his knuckles; the sound was undoubtedly *hollow*.

"A false bottom here!" said he. But he strove in vain to discover the secret of the spring or springs.

"Bother the thing," said he to the smith; "take your chisel and split it up."

This was very speedily done, and an exclamation of intense satisfaction escaped Mr. Weazle when the reward of his journey and inquisition lay before them: the gray-coloured light dust-coat, which he drew forth from amid a heap of letters from Aimée and others, old betting-books, and many odds and ends valued by Foxley, and diving his hands rapidly into each of the pockets, drew forth from the breast one, to his own utter bewilderment—bewilderment at the stupidity of Foxley in preserving them—a bundle of crushed but still crisp notes of the Bank of England, the very missing notes of which he had the numbers in his memorandum-book. He was all but speechless with astonishment at and disgust of Foxley's folly. In all his professional experience he never had "come across such another muff."

"How came you to suspect the existence of this secret drawer?" asked Mr. Brooke, who had come promptly to the room on hearing of the discovery.

"The young lady as left this——"

"My daughter?"

"Exactly, sir—young Mrs. Seymour told me that she knowed her cousin had some such place of concealment in his room; and I came here direct as you see, with official instructions on the subject."

"You have seen my daughter lately then?" asked Mr. Brooke, in a voice which he strove to control.

"I was with her last night."

Regardless of the presence of Mulbery, Mr. Brooke now overwhelmed the detective with a multitude of questions as to how she was living and where—and he shivered when he heard all—how she looked and was dressed. And so much also were the feelings of Mr. Weazle interested in the matter that he unconsciously drained the last drop of the burgundy, though it had so little "body in it."

"Commend me to a woman's instinct, or whatever they calls it, after all, sir," said Mr. Weazle, warming up with his wine and the whole affair. "'If Mr. Alf Foxley hasn't spent the money—and you know he dared not do it after the numbers of the notes were advertised—and if he has not destroyed

them, Mr. Weazle,' said the poor young thing weeping like to break her 'art—that was after she left 'Arley Street—'they're in a secret drawer, which I knows he had in his dressing-room ;' and, sure enough, here they are, no thanks to me, but to *her*."

"Poor Mabel! poor Mabel!" murmured Mr. Brooke; then, after a pause, Mr. Weazle said,

"So you see, sir, we have found out who the gent was in the light-gray coat."

"My nephew is then guilty——"

"Of concealing the money, at least."

"You have the numbers of the notes that were stolen?"

"All here, sir; and we can compare them together, if you please," added the detective, as they adjourned to the library. "That Mr. Foxley took the notes to bring Mr. Seymour into trouble, Mr. Skeemes hasn't a doubt, and that is why he has put the briny between him and Scotland Yard."

"And you are actually a detective!" said Mr. Mulbery, eyeing their visitor as a *lusus naturæ*, having never seen one before.

"Yes, in full bloom."

"And you took to this business naturally?"

"Just as fellows take to shaving or smoking."

The numbers of the notes were duly compared. Mr. Weazle betook him to pen and ink. The dates of Foxley's arrival at and departure from Thaneshurst, and the interest he took in the wearer of the light-dust coat, without admitting that *he* was the visitor, were all duly noted down. The testimony of Mr. Brooke, of Mulbery, and the smith, as to the discovery of that garment and the notes was duly signed, and the whole were sealed up for the use and information of the authorities in Scotland Yard, under the private seal of Mr. Brooke, who was filled anew with shame, amazement, and compunction, and who wrote by the first post to his solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields to join issue with Mr. Skeemes for the protection of Tom Seymour. And after some luncheon with the butler, Mr. Weazle departed from Thaneshurst, very well satisfied, in many ways, with the result of his journey and the amount of wine he had imbibed.

"A valuable old party is Mulbery," he hiccupped, as the

train steamed away from Lewes; "the governor should have him stuffed when he dies and put into a glass case; would look uncommon well in a corner of the library, in his black coat and white veskit."

In the servants' hall it was carried that Alf was foxey by nature as well as by name; and a hundred ugly stories concerning him were now recalled to memory, though Polly Plum, while dangling in her ears the rings he had given her on one occasion in the shrubbery, was heard to mutter a faint dissent.

That night the will which Mr. Brooke had shown Alf, but left unsigned, was, after brief but mature consideration on that gentleman's part, very deliberately committed to the flames.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

### THE WOLF OF BADENOCH.

AND now to explain the reason of mail after mail coming into Gibraltar, and yet there being no letter for Stanley from Connaught Place, though one of importance for him from Mrs. Allingham had unaccountably miscarried.

On a bright August morning—the same morning on which Mr. Weazle overhauled, with such success, the repositories of the absent Mr. Foxley—a beautiful English yacht, with her fore and aft mainsail, gaff-topsail, staysail, jib, and flying jib, all white as snow and bellying out on the wind, might have been seen by the idlers—if there were any—running on a taut bow-line southward and westward off the Bolt Head, that great promontory on the Dorsetshire coast, which is perforated by the Bull's Hole, a mysterious cavern, which has an opening into Saw-mill Bay, and through which the fishermen allege a bull once penetrated. He entered it at one end jet-black, and emerged into the opposite bay white as driven snow.

The spanking cutter in question had the burgee of the Royal Yacht Squadron flying at her masthead, and over her taffrail floated the white ensign with the Union and Red Cross, two pieces of bunting which were "doused" when she got farther off shore,

She was the *Wolf of Badenoch*, belonging to the Master of that name; and had on board his bride—for such the fair Fanny now was—her sister, Mrs. Allingham, and Milly, with Larkspur and Craven of the Hussars, all bound for the Mediterranean on a voyage of enjoyment; and none save those who have been on board of a well-found English yacht can be fully aware of the luxury and comfort to be met with.

The Master of Badenoch had on board his French cook; a captain, who combined the duties of sailing-master with his command, Mr. Frank Fairway, of whom more anon; a couple of mates; a boatswain and crew, who kept all their watches in regular man-of-war fashion. Of the crew six or so were trained as a band. Every morning the decks were swabbed and holystoned till they were milkwhite, every rope was coiled away round the cleats and belaying-pins; her two brass carronades shone like gold work in a Bond Street shop, and the whole craft was trim and a-taunto as any in her Majesty's service. Her rigging was perfect, each rope lying in the chafe of another.

Mudie supplied the books; Collard the piano; while there were cards, drafts, bézique, and backgammon to encourage flirtation and while away the time when nothing was to be seen on deck, which, in such waters as the *Wolf* was to traverse, was seldom the case; and the after part of the saloon-cabin was quite a conservatory with flowers and ferns in glass cases.

She was the flower of the Squadron Regatta at Cowes, and many a shout of applause had she won from the inhabitants of the yachting metropolis as they crowded the beach in thousands to see her "walk the waters like a thing of life"—a veritable belle of the seas—her copper bright as gold, burnished on her sharp bows and all along her beautiful run to the counter. And in this very month she had shone in all her glory along the foreshore of Cowes, where the beach in front of the castle, the grassy slope, and the Green were covered by admiring multitudes, and the *Osborne*, steaming off the harbour, had the royal standard flying at the main, and all the royal children on board shouting with glee; and at such times the *Wolf* was the winner of many a cup, though

all thought her name odd who knew not she was so called from her owner's ancestor, "the *Wolf of Badenoch*," who distinguished himself in the fourteenth century by destroying the cathedral of Elgin. Hence Milly Allingham, Fanny, and her sister, when they donned their orthodox yachting costume —blue Oxford jackets with gilt anchor buttons, with skirts of Cambridge blue—adorned their piquant, saucy, and tiny glazed hats with blue streaming ribbons, inscribed '*Wolf of Badenoch*' in gold letters, to the great delight of Frank Fairway, the gallant commander thereof.

Milly, who was secretly the object of his intense but hopeless admiration, was the delight of the whole crew, for frequently she was in the wildest spirits, and seemed to have cast aside a great deal of her former constitutional calmness, serenity, and aristocratic impassiveness; for, sooth to say, the whole voyage had been suggested by herself, abetted by Fanny Conyers; and manfully she endured the horrors of sickness, when beating down the Channel and off the skirts of the Bay of Biscay, while inspired by the hope that, if they could get into Gibraltar—as of course they should—Stanley might be enabled to join them for a cruise by Malta, Sicily, and the Levant.

Hence the two lovely conspirators, Milly and Fanny—"Dimples" as they used to call her, more dimpled now than ever—had many a covert laugh and many a merry arrangement, made in secret, and all unknown to Larkspur and their other friends; and yet ever and anon a gloom would come over the former, for her affectionate heart could not forget her lost friend Mabel Brooke, and poor Seymour awaiting his trial in the House of Detention. Then she would strive to think that all must yet be well; that, as Tom could not be guilty, he would of necessity be declared innocent; and as old Mr. Brooke was so rich he must in time forgive them, and she would find them all happiness when again she returned to England.

Then Milly's lightness of heart would come back to her, and she would laugh heartily with thoughts of her own when she heard Fanny tinkling on the Collard in the cabin, and singing,

"He thinks I do not love him;"

for she knew that now Stanley was aware *she* loved him well. To Badenoch, Larkspur, and others on board, Milly's change of demeanour—though gayer than ever—was somewhat of an enigma, for her old spirit of coquetry had entirely gone.

Of all those on board she preferred the captain of the yacht, Frank Fairway, a fair-haired and blue-eyed gentlemanly-looking seaman, about forty years of age, who had been some years a midshipman in the Royal Navy; but having made the mistake of becoming his captain's successful rival in a love affair, the latter made the ship a floating pandemonium to him, and so forced him out of the service. Conversational, anecdotical, and intelligent, he made himself especially agreeable to all the ladies on board—to none more perhaps than Milly; and sooth to say the fair passengers were of a type rather different now from what they were before the Master of Badenoch became a Benedict; for even the fair Aimée de Bohun had once been on a trip in the *Wolf* to Norway all unknown to Foxley, and very awkwardly was left behind at Christiania with Craven's brother Lord Oaks, so famous for his turfy proclivities. So Milly spent much of her time on deck with Fairway, to whom she always listened with pleasure.

"Mamma," she said, in explanation of this, "you know how horrid I feel to have to *make* conversation, as one has always to do with such glazed-booted mariners as Larkspur or Craven. Besides, I came to sea to amuse myself—not them."

And a charming picture she made, with her little hands thrust into the pocket of her blue jacket, her hair ruffled by the breeze that blew the long streamers of her piquant hat out behind her, her naturally delicate colour heightened by it, and her eyes sparkling with animation as she listened to Fairway's explanations of all that pertained unto the sea.

"Oh, I should doat upon the life of a sailor!" she exclaimed.

"But one's life is not always spent in a floating drawing-room, like this yacht," replied Fairway, looking softly into her face, while he smiled at her girlish enthusiasm and glee.

"What a deal of the world you must have seen, Captain Fairway!"

"I may say, with a certain writer, Miss Allingham, 'my

rough mode of life is little more than a long catalogue of commonplace hardships—hardships that sailors come to look at as the ordinary events of existence, and which certainly tend to make us somewhat careless of existence, but very ready to enjoy it while it lasts.'"

When it came that the yacht had to work against a head-wind in the chops of the Channel, and encounter a little foul weather when skirting the Bay of Biscay, the ladies did repent that they had not crossed France and met the *Wolf* at Marseilles. But it was too late to repine, and twenty times in the Bay Fanny wept and clung to her laughing spouse, declaring that they were all going to the bottom, for the swell there is dreadful. The Bay presents a wide opening to the full action of the Atlantic, the waters of which roll in with all their weight, till they are arrested on either shore, and hurled back upon the central masses, thus producing a long heavy swell, or waves that are high and short; and on these the tiny yacht was borne about like a cork, after they lost sight of the headland and lighthouse of Ushant—the last of Europe seen by Napoleon, the last of the land of his glory. When the weather was rough, even Badenoch sometimes thought that, "but to please his women folk, it would have been better fun to be potting the grouse in Strathbogie."

But ere Finisterre in Galicia came in sight the ladies had all got "their sea-legs," as Captain Fairway remarked, and very pretty and well-shaped they were, he thought, as the breeze and roll of the yacht had enabled him to observe; and he was too much of a sailor not to be somewhat of a connoisseur in taper ankles and so forth.

To the fair tourists the various headlands and towns, as they ran along the coast of the famous Peninsula, were a source of daily—often hourly—interest, and "John Murray" and "Ford" were ever being referred to, especially by Milly, who deemed each point of land but a step nearer to Gibraltar and to Stanley, and fretted in secret at the frequent anchorages by night.

Now that Finisterre was left astern, after some long tacks off shore, the next land they saw were the Barlengas, a cluster of rocky islets, north-west of Cape Carvocira, and around them the white waves were dashing merrily in the bright morning sunshine.

"These are what we English sailors call the Barling Isles," said Fairway, as he handed his telescope, duly sighted, to Milly, and watched with honest admiration the grace of her pose and the beauty of her bust as she took a long look at the Portuguese fortress and lighthouse that rise above the rocky cluster. "I shall never forget the night on which I saw that bit of Leira last, Miss Allingham."

"Why—what happened?"

"I was in the Queen's service then, Miss Allingham," said Fairway, with a certain sad inflection of voice that always came upon him when he referred to those past days,—"in the Queen's service," he repeated, with a certain spasmodic contraction of the muscles of his handsome bare throat, "and little thought then to end my days as captain of a yacht, unless it might be her Majesty's own, for I was a boy and full of ambition."

"Is this a love story?" asked Milly softly, and dropping her lashes for a second.

"Far from it," said he, laughing; "but it was a singular coincidence or fatality. I was on the Lisbon station, and for the benefit of my health was coming home on sick leave, in one of our merchant vessels bound for London. She was a brig of some two hundred tons, under a captain named Joyce, a man of ungovernable temper, who, on being crossed, or irritated by the most trivial matter, burst out into torrents of oaths and blasphemies that were a horror to listen to. His words often filled the crew with fear, and again and again they told me in secret that not one of them would ship with such a man again, as his language was calculated to bring destruction on the brig and all on board; for we sailors, Miss Allingham, though we *may* rap out a rough word now and then, are generally religious and God-fearing men, with many a superstition that is innocent enough, for it is born of our lonely lives, and the salt-water whereby we live.

"'Revolving light on the port-bow!" shouted the look-out ahead.

"The captain came rushing on deck, uttering such words as *you* cannot conceive, and I would not dare to repeat even to a man. The weather was very stormy; lightning was playing about the crests of the waves; the men looked pale and blankly in each other's faces, and muttered their dread and detestation in whispers.

"The night was undoubtedly a wild one on which to find ourselves almost inside the Barlengas. Thick black banks of clouds were piled up over each other to windward; the thunder grumbled hoarsely; large hot rain-drops were falling, plashing on the deck and in the seething sea. Ere long the whole firmament was shrouded in murky gloom, and nothing could be seen but the revolving light, flashing out at times dimly as a star ahead. By-and-by, as if to add to the weird aspect of the night, alternately with the streaks of lightning, there came a narrow one of moonlight, at the lower edge of the cloud bank, showing the black outlines of the tumbling billows, and amid the bellowing of the wind, and the flapping of the canvas, as another reef was taken in, we heard the captain swearing at the men like a lunatic, using such language that I wonder the teeth didn't drop out of his jaws.

"As the squall was increasing all hands were ordered to shorten sail; and as some of them were slow in their work, again the oaths of the captain were heard above the roaring of the wind and the booming of the sea, and he ended one awful imprecation by saying,

"'May my bones whiten among the Barlengas if I don't rope's-end some of you within an inch of your lives!'

"At that moment a meteor, like a ball of fire, shedding such a ghastly light that every man's face, every wetted rope and plank in the ship were distinctly visible, exploded, with a thundering report, right over the poop, and all again became instant darkness. But where was the captain? Lying on the deck stone dead—struck down, as it were, by the hand of Heaven, in the midst of his blasphemies.

"His body showed no marks of injury, but was quite black, and decomposition set in so fast that ere the revolving light on the greater islet was abeam, we had to throw him overboard. So, sure enough, Miss Allingham, his bones were left to whiten amid the rocks of the Barlengas."

To Milly, Fairway's anecdotes were always unlike any she had ever heard before, especially in the namby-pamby circle called "society;" and often, when he gazed into her dark, earnest, and intelligent eyes, he would sigh and think,

"By Jove, it is enough to make a fellow think better of the world, of life, and of himself, even to look at her!"

And she, on her part, without an atom of her old coquetry, liked the honest sailor; "for it is the law of human nature to feel kindly inclined to those who admire us," and she knew that he admired *her*.

Greatly to Milly's annoyance they lingered at Lisbon, and "did" the Salitre or shady promenade, the royal palace, the cathedral, and the usual amount of picture-galleries which one must see everywhere. Then she hailed Cape St. Vincent with its lofty rocks, and when that of St. Mary was left astern the yacht made one long tack, with a splendid breeze across the Bay of Cadiz, on a moonlight night when a wondrous bright and fairy-like phosphorescence glittered over all the sea.

A soft and lovely evening, when the sun was setting into a golden sea, and when the band was on deck playing "Hearts of Oak" and other national airs, saw the *Wolf* under a spread of white canvas off the sandy headland of Trafalgar, by the old Moorish stronghold of Tarif-al-ghar, and Fairway's clear white eye lit up as he pointed it out to Milly. and reminded her of Nelson and the glorious 21st of October, 1805; for even after the lapse of all these years the name of Trafalgar finds an echo in every English heart.

Long ere the sun rose next day the walls and towers of Tarifa were on the weather-quarter of the yacht, which began to encounter stiff and baffling head-winds as she was hauled up for the Straits of Gibraltar, and Fairway found himself compelled to stand closer in towards the coast of Africa than he could have wished to have done; and so great were the variations of the compass, and so much lee-way was made by the cutter, that even he—at all times jovial and pleasant—lost his temper and became fretful; but Milly was full of bright joy, feeling assured that to-morrow would see them safely moored in the Bay of Gibraltar.

She revelled in the thoughts of Stanley's astonishment on finding her *there;* and again and again she repeated to herself, "Surely no one is so happy as I am!"

Poor Milly!

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

### CAUGHT IN A LEVANTER.

THE baffling wind still continued, and next day's dawn saw the yacht hugging close the coast of Africa, and Fairway, who had taken the morning watch, which extends from four to eight A.M., impatiently pacing the deck and glancing alternately aloft and to windward, but thinking all the while of Milly Allingham.

"What can there be in this girl that interests me so?" thought he, as he trod to and fro in the dusk of the early morning, right over the place where he knew she lay abed. "She is, of course, very unlike any one I ever met before, and I am not a young spoon now to fall in love with every pretty face—pretty! Hers is downright lovely! Besides, they say she is engaged to some soldier-fellow in Gib."

"They" had been Miss Araminta Conyers, who had, in a moment of confidence, hinted at this to Fairway—out of kindness of course—though her attention was then fully occupied by Craven. The latter—a good-looking young fellow, with no angularities or leading features of character—had devoted himself to little Araminta, who had only to look herself to please most people, and who had a sufficient amount of vivacity and conversational power to pass for being clever, and even witty.

Her face was a very perfect one, and most pure in its contour and complexion, with its white and pink, a rosebud mouth, a nose a little *retroussé*, with blue-gray eyes that were more blue than gray, with long black lashes that contrasted in hue with her golden-brown hair and dark eyebrows: and, moreover, she was, as Craven asserted, "a stunning girl, who could do ten miles of round dancing on the wing of a chicken and glass of champagne-cup!"

Every way the little party on board the yacht was a pleasant one; but though it was apparent to none, there had been a species of rivalry between Major Larkspur and Fairway; not that Milly Allingham was the kind of girl the former generally affected; for, sooth to say, that gallant field-officer stood somewhat in awe of her, and one like the fair Aimée was

more in his way ; and certainly *he* was not the style of man who came up to Milly's standard of taste.

But dazzled by her undoubted beauty, by perpetual propinquity in their circumscribed circle, the major thought himself in love ; and if disposed to play with edged tools, he might find Milly much sharper than his regulation sword. But in the preoccupation of her thoughts she was but half aware of the flattering mode in which the Hussar—now clad in accurate yachting costume—was wont to address her, till one day he wound up a long and lisped oration on love by adding in his most insinuating manner,

"Who talks of love, Miss Allingham, makes it."

"That depends, major, upon whom it is told of to, and when."

"Of course."

"Then don't talk of it to me at any time—*now* especially," she replied, laughing.

"You are very severe with me," replied the baffled Larkspur, also laughing nevertheless. He had decidedly a good opinion of himself on the score of personal attractions ; and he never permitted a doubt to enter his mind—not a very capacious one—that, backed up by his substantial monetary qualities, and his good cash account at Bullion, Goldie, and Co.'s bank, he was somewhat irresistible. Thus, as they had voyaged on together, he had thought from time to time,

"'She is a woman, therefore may be wooed ;
She is a woman, therefore may be *won*.'

Go it, Larkspur ! Surely she could never be so blind to her own interests and to your good qualities as to decline a proposal when you actually choose to make one."

But before his august mind was made up, some very startling events occurred.

Singularly enough, though Fairway, with his limited means —a salary derived from the Master of Badenoch—no more thought of proposing for an heiress like Milly than of jumping overboard, he had the instinctive feeling of having a rival in Larkspur, whom he greatly disliked ; not that he envied him for his wealth, for Fairway was too generous and good-hearted to envy any one ; but he despised him for the fine airs he gave

himself, and thought him "a cavalry parvenu." And one thing that worried the honest Fairway was, that he could not adopt with regard to Milly the *empressé* manner of the Hussar.

The very moustaches of poor Larkspur, carefully bandolined into a ring at each end, were, if a source of unlimited employment to him, one of contempt to Fairway, who indulged only in a very nautical pair of whiskers, with two fingers' breadth of clean-shaven chin between; and when the major—some of whose antecedents had been discovered by the French cook of the yacht—treated him, as he sometimes did, patronisingly, Fairway would turn away and mutter angrily,

"D—n his impudence! He is called the son of a Turkey merchant in the Hussars; would the mess like to know that his papa sells poultry—turkeys certainly—in Leadenhall Market, and that, thanks to his industry, he can keep half-a-dozen nags in barracks, while some who are his betters are glad to pay two guineas a day for a mount to the hounds?"

And some such thoughts as these were chafing the mind of Fairway when Milly, fresh as a newly unfolded rosebud, came smilingly on deck, and, presenting her hand, asked him where Gibraltar was now.

"Ah, it is always Gib. that's uppermost in her mind. What a fool I am to indulge in daydreams of what *might* be!" thought he. "Gibraltar, Miss Allingham," he added aloud, "lies over there on the weather-bow, about twenty-two miles off. Can you see the blue outline of something like a lion?"

"I do," said she, smiling brightly; "but in size it looksmore like a mouse," she added, gazing at it earnestly and wistfully, and shading her beautiful eyes with a snowy hand, while the other rested on the arm of Fairway. "Shall we—shall we be there to-night?"

"Not with this wind, especially if it freshens, as I fear it will. The weather is too rough already for you to be on deck.'

Indeed, while he spoke, the yacht, laid as close to the wind as she could be, was shipping sea after sea ahead; and the watch forward, as they turned their backs and sou'-westers to the breeze, were undergoing a perpetual system of drenching.

Just as he was handing her towards the companion-way the boatswain came aft, and touching his hat said,

"Do you see what is abeam of us to leeward, sir, and keeping way with the cutter?"

Fairway turned, and after looking, seemed a little disconcerted—for seamen have strange instincts and superstitions.

"A hammer-headed shark, by Jove!" he exclaimed.

"A hammer-headed shark it is, sir; and I would rather not have seen it."

"Nor I, with this Levanter evidently freshening fast. Do the watch know of it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then to be forewarned is to be forearmed; and we'll have some rough work ere we get our ground-tackle rove."

In total mystery as to what all this meant, Milly went below, feeling fretful at the conviction, that though Gibraltar was in sight they would be some time in reaching it, and all because of that odious wind. Oh, how much she wished the yacht had been a steamer, and thus indifferent to head-winds and opposing currents!

The shark in question, which was supposed to be ominous of some coming disaster—a storm at least—is often found in the Mediterranean, and not unfrequently in other seas. It is the most hideous fish that swims; and the seamen watched its strange head, made like the letter T, all mouth, with an eye at each end, as it bobbed from time to time above the white seething water.

After a little it disappeared; but the crew, who were all on deck now, were clustered forward, whispering and looking to leeward in search of the shark again, till there came a blast that nearly laid the cutter on her beam-ends, and caused Fairway at once to take in the gaff-topsail and flying jib, and the sea began to froth and whiten against the dense black banks of cloud that came rolling up to windward, from the horizon to the zenith.

"Poor girl!" thought Fairway, "she'll not see Gibraltar to-night—nor the soldier-fellow either!"

Then he began to wonder whether she was to remain there, whether go to Malta and Sicily with the *Wolf*, and whether she would come back with him. He felt he would miss her society sorely; their intercourse had been so pleasant; and to him it was delightful to have felt himself *au mieux* with such a

girl as Milly Allingham, from the very day she had come on board.

But now the gentlemen of the party came on deck, and they, with the necessity for taking another reef in the fore and aft mainsail, and strengthening the guys of the mainboom, somewhat interrupted the ruminations of Captain Fairway.

"How do you think the weather looks?" asked the Master of Badenoch, turning up the collar of his pea-jacket, as the spray hissed about him.

"Very dirty, as you may see, sir," replied Fairway; "and I am afraid we are in for a night of it, with a very stiff Levanter."

"Deuced annoying; so the ladies must keep to the cabin."

Indeed, it was blowing so hard now, that Badenoch and his friends could not keep their cigars alight, and betook them to short meerschaums, of wonderful size, construction, and colouring; and swaying about on the heels of their glazed boots, with their hands in their jacket-pockets, they all tried to look as nautical as possible, and as if "quite used to this sort of thing, you know."

And yet, with all their harmless nautical foppery, our three Hussars were perhaps second to none of those who rode in the Death Ride at Balaclava, and would have done their *devoir* there, or anywhere, as nobly and as well, though they undoubtedly had the *blasé* tone of London men of fashion, tempered and improved by that bearing which pertains alone to the officers of our cavalry.

The gale increased to an absolute storm, and ere long Fairway had to reduce the canvas on the cutter to only what was necessary to steer her by, and enable them to do their best in working off a dangerous lee-shore, towards which the current ever and anon bore them.

Keeping the cutter as close to the wind as she would lie, the whole of that dark day was spent in struggling with the tempest, and so opaque was the sky, that night—a night brightened by flashes of lightning alone—seemed to come on before its time; and as nothing could be seen of the coast, the leadsman was ever at work with the hand-lead; but as yet there was no symptom of shoaling in the foam-flecked water.

The darkness was so dense and heavy that, as Larkspur said, one seemed to *feel* it; and only once or twice the land

was visible, when the sky seemed to be rent asunder by a strangely prolonged and vivid flash of lightning.

The pride of Cowes behaved bravely. Over her low gunwales and flush deck the waves rolled with irresistible force; but she swam like a duck, and rose from them buoyantly and defiantly, though only a few yards of canvas were spread; the jib-boom was run on board; the square yard was brought on deck, and the gaff-yard lowered as much as it could be for working. Everything had been made fast aloft and alow; and when Fairway gave the order to have "the dead-lights shipped in the stern windows," the four ladies all huddled together, looking so white and terrified in the cabin, thought it had a very dreadful sound, supposing that ghastly lanterns of some kind were referred to.

In the pretty boudoir-like little cabin everything was in a state of confusion; and the ladies were too full of fear and many conflicting thoughts to take any heed of the time; but the day that had preceded the night seemed to have been a long, long, and certainly terrible one. They saw nothing of that lightning which on deck imparted by its powerful blaze a livid tint to every face and rope and spar, as the skylights had been secured and covered up by tarpaulings; but they could hear the incessant rushing and washing of the water, as it burst over the deck from time to time, the trampling of feet, the hoarse sound of human voices, the bellowing of the wind, and a medley of other sounds, produced they knew not by what, yet all, to them, fraught with terror.

Fanny's bright hazel eyes, that were always laughing—the Master of Badenoch averred that they laughed even in her sleep—were scared in expression, and filled with great welling tears of more than childish terror and dismay; and from the gentlemen, who came down from time to time to have a refresher from the steward, and who looked drenched, white, and grimy, for each had to take his spell at the pumps, she could obtain no information, but only assurances that they were, as yet, in no danger. And pretty Fanny tried to pray. She had now forgotten all about that which had been their chief topic during the voyage—a ball which Stanley's regiment would be sure to give them when they reached Gibraltar.

During all this catastrophe Milly was in an agony of remorse ; and as she embraced her pallid mother and clung to her, in her secret heart she feared that she had lured her to a dreadful death by selfishly bringing her on this yachting excursion, which she (Milly) and Fanny had schemed and devised between them.

And oh, she thought, was it not dreadful for her and them all to be perishing almost in sight of Gibraltar, where *he* was, in total ignorance of their peril and fate—at that moment, perhaps, merry at mess with his brother officers—perishing after all their separation, his past dangers, and all their miserable mistakes—perishing when on the very eve of meeting ! How cruel, how inexorable was Destiny !

From time to time Mrs. Allingham read them passages from the Scriptures, particularly the twenty-first, twenty-second, and twenty-third verses of the thirty-third chapter of Isaiah.

Suddenly there was a dreadful crash on deck, and a simultaneous shriek escaped them all.

" Don't be alarmed, ladies," said the boatswain, coming half way down the companion-stairs ; " it's only the topmast snapped off at the cap ; but it's all along o' that ere —— shark !"

The wreckage was cut away, and the cutter laboured less. Fairway had wished to strike the mast, but the fid was fouled in some way and could not be withdrawn, so the blast broke it off like a piece of barley-sugar.

" I would to God, sir," said Fairway, " we had the ladies safe on shore. I should not care for ourselves ; some of us would weather the gale somehow, even if we rode it out on hencoops."

Neither Craven nor Larkspur seemed to think the latter would be a pleasant alternative. But now, about midnight, the gale began to abate ; the lightning ceased to play, and the thunder seemed to rumble afar off at the horizon ; the wind and sea went down together ; the reefs were shaken out of the fore and aft mainsail ; the gaff hoisted a bit, and the jib was sheeted home. But the rattle of the chain pumps was ceaseless, for the *Wolf* had started a leak somewhere, and pure water came from the well.

As day crept in, the land became visible, and very close too. Fairway knew that the mountains he saw were the chain of the Little Atlas, which approaches nearer to the coast, though running sometimes parallel to the Great Atlas; but whether he was off Tangiers or Ceuta, he was unable to determine; but on seeing a pretty little bight or bay open, with a small town or village, before which some fisher-boats lay hauled up on the beach, he steered in, sounding with the lead, and came to anchor in ten fathom water.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### THE PICNIC PARTY.

FAIRWAY'S chief object here was to set up his spare topmast, and have the leak looked to, ere he stood over the Straits to Gibraltar. The morning was one of great beauty; the sky was serene; the sunshine hot—so much so that he had the awning shipped over the quarter-deck; and there the ladies, all laughter and smiles, in the revulsion of spirit after the late terrors they had undergone, had their coffee, and looked with unfeigned interest on the land; for the little creek in which they lay was a portion of the mighty continent of Africa.

In Africa, thought Milly; and but a week or two before she and Fanny had been caracoling their horses in Rotten Row.

A boat from the shore now came off to the yacht, pulled by four men, who seemed to be half-Arabs and half-Spaniards—dusky, swarthy, and black-eyed fellows, with glossy glittering eyes, rings in their ears, and wearing their hair in nets. They had oranges, citrons, and pomegranates for sale; and from one who called himself by the mongrel name of Ben Targa, and who spoke a little English—picked up no doubt at Gibraltar—they learned that the creek in which they had anchored was distant a few miles from the Spanish station of Ceuta, and in the territory of the Sultan of Morocco.

On this new land and varied scene the party in the yacht, now in the highest spirits and glee, could not but look with interest—the Arab cottages clustering near the white sandy beach, each with its little garden and well, and nestling amid topes of orange, citron, and lime-trees; the ripe wheat waving

yellow on the upland slopes beyond ; and far away in the distance the snow-capped peaks of the Atlas chain. So it was immediately voted and passed that all should go ashore, while Fairway looked after the refitting of the yacht; but he, having been up the Mediterranean before, warned the gentlemen of the party, and all men who might accompany them, to go well armed, as there were certain dangers to be met with in that part of the world in the shape of escaped criminals from Ceuta, where the Spaniards keep a number of galley-slaves in chains —hard-worked, half-starved, and nearly naked, and who, when they did achieve their escape, became the enemies of all mankind. Then there were the Arab vedettes, who keep a strict watch upon Ceuta, and suffer no intercourse to take place between it and the interior, so that the territory does not extend beyond the range of their own guns upon the fortress; and the said vedettes were not particular to a shade in their mode of handling any strangers who fell into their hands.

The Master of Badenoch, Larkspur, and Craven made very light of all these warnings, and the first-named laughingly said,

"By Jove, Fanny, we'll have a picnic among the Moors! I have been speaking to that fellow with the ear-rings, Ben Targa—a picturesque-looking villain, isn't he? He tells me there is a grand cascade on a stream about a league or so inland—the only thing worth seeing hereabouts. The steward shall pack a hamper for us—we'll cool our champagne in the stream ; and by the time we come back the yacht will be ready for standing across the Straits."

The ladies prepared to go ashore with alacrity. The steward, with two assistants, soon packed a basket, which was to be borne shoulder-high, slung on a boat-hook ; and the sight of some Spanish dollars made Ben Targa amazingly active in procuring four mules for the ladies ; and as they set forth inland under his guidance, the entire population of the village would have accompanied them, had not he—a man in some authority among them apparently—ordered all to retire, though the Master of Badenoch rather enjoyed the spectacle —the men either half-naked or muffled in the *haique* or white-woollen plaid peculiar to the Moors, and the dark-skinned, meagre, yet active-looking boys wearing little more than a

*cummerbund* or cloth round the loins. As for women, none were visible.

Mrs. Allingham felt uncertain about an expedition on which the gentlemen found it a wise precaution to take their revolvers, and even their breech-loading fowling-pieces, as they might find something "to pot;" but the three young ladies were enchanted with the novelty of the whole affair, and surveyed with delight the groves of oranges, lemons, the prickly pear, and the Barbary fig that bordered the way; but all the land seemed open, and in many places uncultivated.

The three officers were on foot, walking each by the side of a lady. Ben Targa, the hybrid Arab or Spaniard, went in front, bare-legged and bare-footed, leading the bridle of Mrs. Allingham's mule; while the steward and two seamen with the hamper brought up the rear. But to judge by the time it took them, the distance they proceeded inland was evidently much more than a league—nearly two; but then Ben Targa's ideas of miles might, no doubt, be somewhat vague; and as they ascended into higher ground, whence at times the blue Straits were visible, Milly often turned in her saddle, in the hope of seeing Gibraltar.

The Master of Badenoch saw her doing so, and said with a smile,

"You will be nearer it by this time to-morrow, Miss Allingham; for the wind has veered round to the south-west, and we shall have a delightful run across. You will see how we shall leave the Moors astern of us."

Milly coloured a little at this remark, as it showed her that he knew something of her secret; and she asked Larkspur, who was marching on by her side, fanning himself with his glazed hat, if his regiment had ever been stationed there.

"Oh, no," said he, with a laugh, in which his brother-officers joined; "cavalry never go on service to the Mediterranean."

"Where the devil can this cascade be?" asked the Master looking about him, and then questioning Ben Targa, who, grinning, showed all his white teeth, and said in English and Spanish,

"Come this way, sir," pointing to a ridge of rocks, the steepness of which compelled the ladies to leave their mules, the

bridles of which he skilfully linked together; and then, as they penetrated over this ridge and through a grove of olive-trees, the thunder of a cascade began to be heard; and suddenly, as the trees opened, they came upon a scene that fully rewarded them for the toil of their walk from the creek, and an exclamation of surprise and pleasure burst even from the usually languid and lymphatic Larkspur, who was rather apt to ridicule the picturesque in general, and scenery in particular, as "a weak invention of artists, hotel-keepers, and novelist-fellows."

The cascade was a kind of rapid in a mountain-stream that bowled away towards the Straits. It was steep, some forty yards in breadth, and nearly a hundred in height. Over a horseshoe-shapen mouth of rock the snowy torrent poured, in vast and ceaseless volume, into a raging abyss of foam and spray below, whence it gurgled away in its bed of rock to meet the sea.

The sunbeams, falling upon the cascade, imparted to it the most splendid rainbow tints, while vapoury mists rose high in air on every side. The bright green palms and cork-trees that overhung the rocks imparted a wonderful beauty to the scene; while the bordering masses of stone, like the fallen ruins of a cyclopean wall, were covered with luxuriant aromatic plants. The tall-stemmed genista, the different species of cistus, mignonette, and cactus were all growing there, and the solitude of the place seemed great, for no sound broke it save the ceaseless roar of the descending water.

The beauty, verdure, and grandeur of the whole scene were very great.

"But the noise is a little stunning," said Fanny; so, retiring to a plateau of rock a little way back from the head of the cascade, the steward began to unpack his hamper, and, after spreading a snowy tablecloth, to lay out the edibles, while the drinkables were placed for coolness in a tiny pool of the stream.

A draught of wine was then given to their guide, who retired, as he said, to look after the mules.

Jack Fortnum, the steward, rather prided himself upon his catering, quite as much as the French cook of the yacht did on his *cuisine*; the *pâtés de foie gras*, the veal-and-ham pie,

the trout stewed in madeira, and cold roast fowls, the sauces and accessories of every kind, were unexceptionable. The fruits were the luscious melons, oranges, and pomegranates just procured from Ben Targa, and grapes from home, packed in sawdust. The champagne, the château Yquem, hockheimer, and moursirender moselle, and even the bitter beer, were, we have said, cooling in the stream, where the gilded necks of the former alone were visible.

The novelty of the situation was great, even to those who were palled and *blasé* with amusement and pleasure ; thus all were disposed to the full for joy and merriment ; but now and then a little shrill cry would escape Milly or Fanny, as a huge ugly grasshopper, of a size and aspect peculiar to the clime, appeared among the grass, and once, too, a scorpion of most portentous proportion ; however, it was promptly killed by Jack Fortnum, who "jobbed" a dinner-knife into it.

There, too, were hovering about an incredible number of butterflies, the wings of which were variegated by the most brilliant colourings, some being green edged with shining gold, others were sky-blue edged with silver, and some like dark-purple velvet bordered by both.

Ever and anon the quick white fingers of Milly and her fair friends would try in vain to catch one, and amid much heedless merriment, fun, and idle conversation the pleasant popping of the cooled champagne was heard from time to time.

"We have to thank you very much for an unexpected pleasure," said Mrs. Allingham to the Master. "Your picnic is quite a brilliant idea, after all we underwent last night."

"And I am so sorry we haven't Mr. Fairway with us," added Milly.

"Good fellow Fairway," replied the Master, "but he prefers his yacht to all the world."

Milly smiled one of her conscious smiles, which she saw reflected in Fanny's eyes, and which was as much as to say,

"I don't think he would prefer his yacht to *me* !"

"Another round of the champagne, Fortnum," said the Master ; and the glasses were held up readily—for the day was warm—as the steward went round.

"Ah," said Larkspur, "the best comfort to be got in this world is that we receive at the hands of the Bottle Imp."

"Please don't say so, major," urged Mrs. Allingham.

"I think his remark quite naughty. You know, major, I am a matron, and entitled to rebuke you."

"More than all, you are my hostess," said the major; who added, as he wiped his moustaches with a damask napkin, and reclined on the rich soft grass: "Badenoch, my boy, Fortnum's lunch has been a success—first-rate, in fact—and the cliquot has been out-and-out."

"Why, Larkie, it is the same stuff we have been getting every day since we left Cowes. But I think we should give that Arab fellow—Ben what's-his-name—a drop. Attend to him, please, Fortnum."

"What shall I give him, sir?"

"A bumper of champagne."

"Dashed with brandy. We'll have some fun with the fellow then," suggested the mischievous major; who, however, was doomed to be disappointed; for after Fortnum, with bottle and a rummer in hand, had gone in search of Ben Targa, that personage was nowhere to be seen, neither were the four mules.

"He was our guide here—he must come back," said the Master; adding, "Allow me, ladies," as he lit a cigar.

"Of course; how should we reach the beach else—and without the mules?" exclaimed Mrs. Allingham, whose proportions were somewhat ample.

"Oh, never fear; the beggar is only in the bush somewhere," said the Master. "He has not yet been paid for his services, and will be sure to turn up in time."

The time passed on, however, and he did not "turn up." This circumstance was remarked again and again, but none made open reference to what was recurring in all their minds —the warnings of Fairway ere they left the yacht; their ignorance of the way back to the creek, and the difficulty of taking the ladies there on foot, if the fellow, by some chance or design, failed to return.

But what design could he have in view?

## CHAPTER L.

### THE SKIRMISH.

THE day was beginning to be pretty well advanced, and now the grand chain of the Lesser Atlas, with all its snow-capped summits, was gradually assuming some gorgeous tints, and turning from opal to purple, gold, and crimson against the pure deep blue of the sky ; and after looking at his watch, the Master of Badenoch began to think it was imperative they should make some movement towards the yacht. But the steward and his two assistants, who had repacked their hampers preparatory to departure, searched all the neighbourhood of the cascade in vain for the guide and his four mules.

"What do you see, Craven?" asked the Master of his subaltern, who, having adjusted a powerful field-glass, was looking with it steadily in one direction, and replied,

"I see him we are in search of."

"Ben Targa?"

"Yes."

"What the devil is he about?"

"Going to have some shooting apparently, as he is armed with a musket."

"Your glass for a moment, Craven. Thanks." After looking for a moment, the Master changed colour. "He is not alone. Five other men are with him now, and they are loitering on a rock *between* us and the way we must infallibly go to reach the yacht."

"Now what may this mean?" asked Larkspur.

"More than we yet see; for they seem to be watching, but not approaching us."

"That scoundrel Ben Targa has broken his word—armed with a musket too."

"We don't live usually in a world of melodrama," said Craven, who had again betaken himself to his glass ; "but, by Jove, I don't like the look of those fellows on the rock."

One or two of them had on little more than blue baggy Arab breeches. All were very brown, bare-legged, barefooted, and well bearded. Two wore the tarboosh of a dirty

dusky red; two had turbans, and one a straw hat, with his black hair done up in a net; and all had muskets in their hands and knives in their girdles. That their intentions were hostile scarcely admitted a doubt; and Badenoch turned to his charming little wife, now, like her companions, scared and pallid, and there flashed upon his mind the agonising thought of what their fate might be in the hands of such men as these. The papers had been teeming lately with details of the outrages committed on some English tourists by the Greek brigands, and his blood ran cold.

"Some of those unpleasant-looking fellows are Europeans," said Craven.

"Spaniards?"

"Yes, three certainly—escaped *galeotes*, or slaves from Ceuta, each 'the best of cut-throats,' no doubt," added Craven, as he opened his breech-loader, and quietly dropped a cartridge into each barrel and readjusted the pin.

"I wish I had a section of my troop here with their carbines," said the Master; "we'd polish off these fellows double-quick."

"Fairway's warnings were sound, after all. O mamma, mamma!" moaned Milly.

"Take courage, Miss Allingham; we are at present six to six, and better armed," said Craven.

"At present yes, sir," said Jack Fortnum, to whom Craven handed his revolver, as Larkspur and the Master did theirs to the two seamen, retaining their own breech-loading rifles; "but many more o' them beggars may come upon us before the shindy is ended."

"We might defend this rock all night, till Fairway comes in search of us; and we have still plenty of provisions in the hamper," said the Master cheerfully.

"And six more bottles of cliquot still untouched," said Larkspur, as he and the Master loaded.

These actions were not unseen by the men on the rock, about sixty yards off. They were evidently engaged in conferring together, and gesticulated violently. Once or twice one would advance, beckoning on the rest to follow him; but none did so. At last Ben Targa was seen coming to the front alone; and cocking his breech-loader, the Master

went forward to meet him, despite the piteous entreaties of Fanny and Larkspur's offer to go instead.

Halting within twenty yards of each other, the Master said :

"Hi, you fellow, Ben Targa, or whatever you call yourself, what do you mean by loitering, as you do? Why the deuce don't you bring the mules?"

"*Los mulos*, aha!" he replied, with a grin ; "the mules will not be required."

"Then how are the ladies to get to the beach?"

"*Las senoras* are *not* going to the beach."

"Where then?" asked the Master, breathing hard and fiercely.

"With you and the other senors to a village near this," he replied, in a jargon of Spanish and English.

"For what purpose?"

"Till we arrange about one leetle, *leetle* ransom—the *duros* —guineas Inglesos ; a thousand for each of you!"

"Six thousand pounds! I wish you may get them."

"Thanks, senor."

"Take care of what you are about, rascal. I shall report you," exclaimed the Master, slapping the butt of his rifle.

"To whom?"

"The kaid of your province, and to the English consul at Tangiers."

"If you live to see him, senor—if you live to see him," grinned the fellow, as he defiantly slapped the butt of *his* musket, one of those made at Tetuan, and withdrew to confer again with his gang, shouting as he went, "Lo digo muy de voras! (I am in earnest!)"

"It is as I expected," said the Master grimly—"a case of ransom and extortion, perhaps worse ; but we must not trust ourselves alive in the hands of those fellows. We'll do them, however, never fear."

In spite of all his endeavours to appear confident and cheerful, the agitation of the Master of Badenoch—an agitation born of his keen anxiety for the safety of the four ladies, especially of his wife—was expressed in his face. He looked pale and anxious, and his manner, though naturally a brave fellow, was embarrassed and disordered ; for this *blasé*

Hussar—this Master of Badenoch, who had run through the whole curriculum of London life, with all its luxury, vice, and folly—loved now little Fanny with a dog-like devotion of which once he could never have believed himself capable; and this love for "Dimples" had raised him to a purer and better state of existence.

Stories of the cruelties and outrages committed on the defenceless and helpless by the Sepoy mutineers, by Greek pirates in the Archipelago, by Wallachians, and so forth, came rushing confusedly on his memory, and perhaps on the memories of them all; for they had no time to compare notes then, death and terror were too close at hand.

And on Milly's mind there flashed the idea—as when in the gale yesternight—could Stanley but know her peril! And her soul, though a brave one, sank within her at the prospect of all they might have to endure; for though the day and year of the Christian era are the same, there is a vast difference between the comfort and safety of being within a league of Connaught Place and Ceuta, Tyburnia, and the province of Tangiers.

But the Master of Badenoch saw the necessity of infusing courage and cheerfulness into those about him.

"D—n the half-naked beggar's impudence!" said he; "thinking to get a thousand pounds a head for us men fellows; the ladies he deems, no doubt, priceless. So do I. In that we agree. Every man has his price—"

"Ah, so said Sir Robert Peel or—Walpole, was it?" said Larkspur, floundering.

"I don't know, Larkie, and I don't care; but I hope these scoundrels will get more lead than gold out of us."

"As we cannot force our way past them, we can but defend this post until succour comes from the yacht," said Larkspur. "Fairway is sure to come on with an armed party, when he finds that we don't return."

"But how can he know where we are?" suggested Craven. "We landed for a lark, and we have got one with a vengeance."

One fellow was now seen to leave his companions and disappear in their rear. It was but too evident he had gone for a reinforcement, and, while awaiting, the rest were seen

to light their cigars, and squat on the grass with their arms beside them; and to the little English party it was a time of keen anguish and anxiety; for to await the coming of more ruffians was to insure their destruction, and to attempt to leave this rocky fastness, when the river protected their rear, might, by drawing the fire of those who remained, end in the death or mutilation of some of the ladies. As for the men, they never thought of themselves.

It is very doubtful if Ben Targa and his brother-rascals would have ventured on their outrageous proceedings but for the state of confusion in which Morocco had so suddenly become involved—a state in which it still is, as the papers of the present day inform us.

Never very well ordered at any time, the whole country was convulsed, and an army under Ben Hamo, by order of the Sultan, was then encamped in the valley of Zeenat to chastise the plundering hill-tribes of the Tangier provinces, who are cattle-lifters and cut-throats. Many of the chiefs had been seized, fined, fettered, and imprisoned. But the Sultan and all his officials are little better than thieves; and when the finances require to be replenished the kaids, or governors of provinces, if they value their heads, have to put the screw without mercy on all the richest merchants and notables, by saying simply, "Sinda (our lord) wants money; he who fails to bring me a thousand piastres shall die under the bastinado." In 1870 the kaid of Dar-el-Beida, for failing to find the requisite sum, underwent, for a whole month, the daily torture of being hoisted up, quite nude, between two erect poles, and let fall upon a heap of branches of the Barbary fig-tree, which are armed with long thorns, that penetrate deep into the flesh, producing tortures under which he expired.

When the Sultan has extorted a sufficient sum, he restores his victim to all his former honours, and waits till he is ready for a fresh application; or he may send for him, receive him with extraordinary favour, and present him with a cup of coffee. A few hours after the royal audience the favoured person always expires in violent convulsions.

Such was, and is, the pleasant country in which the little picnic party found themselves so suddenly menaced by

unusual perils. It seemed too incredible to be situated like people in a novel or drama—they, English folks, and folks of fashion too. What *does* it—what *can* it mean? they thought. Is it a dream or a reality? They cannot all have that horrible dream at once."

In the pale face of Mrs. Allingham there was an expression of agony for Milly that seemed to have aged it by several years.

Craven and Larkspur were genuine Londoners, and hence, so far as the great world goes, were somewhat provincial, and apt to judge of everything by the standard of Piccadilly and the Old Bailey; but here they were beyond their calculation, and they were in such a scrape as rarely befell the roving Englishman or British tourist; yet there was no want of pluck in them; and as for the Master of Badenoch, his Highland blood rose to fever-heat with rage at the whole affair.

The fellows on the rock were now joined by some more, making their number fifteen in all, and all armed. Thus there were but six armed Britons to oppose these desperadoes. There was an intensely clear yellow light—the light that precedes sunset by an hour or so; and it brought all their picturesque figures out in strong and striking outline. This was so much the worse for themselves, but all the better for our three officers with their double-barrelled breech-loaders.

After a little consultation, the whole began to advance, but slowly, with Ben Targa a few yards in front; but they halted when the Master brought his rifle to his shoulder.

"We are all well armed," he shouted, "and deadly shots too, as you will find. Not a piastre shall you get as ransom; so tell your scoundrels so in their own language, whatever it is. Help is coming on to us from our ship, and you will all be severely punished."

Fierce and ironical laughter greeted the translation of this by Ben Targa, and again the advance was resumed.

Badenoch found the impossibility and futility, too, of further trifling. Again he raised his rifle, and as he took a steady and remarkably Hythe-like aim a wild and startled expression came into the faces of the ladies, who put their hands to their ears or eyes, and gave one united shriek, when one barrel went off with what sounded a very dreadful bang.

A yell from the gang responded, and, shot clean through the head, Ben Targa gave a wild bound upward, and without a cry fell prone on his face stone-dead.

"Down, Fanny; down, ladies! Keep under cover behind the ridge of rock," cried Badenoch. "We must keep down too, my friends, and fire in succession, each reserving his fire till the other reloads; we must never have all barrels empty at once.

Bang, bang, went two shots from Craven and Larkspur, and two more fell wounded, as they were seen to roll about in agony. This rather cooled the ardour of the rest, who, as they opened fire, did so from behind boulders, broom, and genista bushes, instead of advancing with a rush, as the Englishmen feared they might do; so the latter lay flat in rear of the ridge, which formed a species of breastwork, and in this Wimbledon fashion opened a fire at regular intervals, and in a style the foe did not quite appreciate.

The balls of the latter, which evidently came from old muzzle-loading guns, went wide of their mark.

"Curses upon them!" suddenly exclaimed Larkspur, as the rifle fell from his grasp—a ball had pierced his right hand, which was instantly covered with blood. "I am useless now," he added; "here, Jack Fortnum, take my rifle. First bind up my hand with a handkerchief—so—thanks. I shall hurry to the yacht for help, while you show what fight you can here. Charge the revolver for me fully; and Heaven have mercy on any nigger or Arab who attempts to stop me, for I'll have none. I'll go all the pace I can. Goodbye, ladies. I'm off like a bird—but a winged one!"

To bring succour if possible was the only way in which poor Larkspur could be useful now.

"I can easily get back to the creek in three-quarters of an hour or less," he added, as he slid down into a little ravine near the stream, got completely out of sight, and made off with all the speed he could exert by the way, so far and so closely as he could recollect and judge, they had come; and as he recognised the landmarks and bearings his confidence and hope rose together, and such speed did he exert that in a very short time the sound of the intermittent firing in his rear died away.

Till the firing began, the ladies had failed to realise fully that there was any real danger. We live in such safety and ease at times, that to be suddenly involved in such a skirmish —an affair of life and death—seemed almost impossible. Yet it was so.

"Now, Fanny," said Badenoch cheerily,—"now to test the rifle and pistol practice of the Royal Hussars. By Jove! there is another fellow knocked over—showing his heels where his head should be."

But Fanny only wept wildly on the bosom of her sister, and Milly lay with her face buried in her mother's lap; and while crouching thus thought, would they ever survive to relate how the horrid bullets of these ferocious and swarthy wretches hissed over them, or shred away the twigs from the olive-trees, ripped up the turf, or, with a little crash, were flattened out like silver stars on the rocks beyond where they lay, hiding and trembling like poor rabbits in their burrow.

"Come, come, Fanny, don't give way thus!" urged her husband, as he dropped a sixth cartridge into his rifle and closed the breech-pin; "you'll see how we'll knock over the entire lot like ninepins. Close as they lurk, there are four *hors de combat* already. Why, Fanny darling, even the poor stags in Badenoch turn and become desperate and dangerous when cornered by the hounds; and *we* are not cornered by these curs yet. How many rounds have you, Craven?"

"Twenty still."

"And you, Fortnum?"

"There are eighteen in the major's belt, sir."

"Good. I have nearly thirty—sixty-eight rounds; ammunition cannot fail us."

But now the besiegers, if they could be called so, began to change their tactics. They divided themselves into two parties; and while six maintained a fire from the front, five others, creeping on their hands and knees and dragging their muskets under them, came round to attack the flank of the ridge which protected their victims. But as they drew nearer, the sputtering fire of the revolvers was heard, as the two seamen, who were armed with these weapons, opened upon them.

Larkspur had been gone more than an hour ; the sun's red disc was just beginning to dip beyond a great grove of evergreen oaks ; the shadows of everything were deepening and falling far to the eastward ; but there was no sign of succour yet when this perilous flank movement was made ; and moans and sighs of terror and dismay escaped the ladies.

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## CHAPTER LI

### THE FELUCCA.

ON the same morning when the *Wolf of Badenoch*, crippled by the loss of her topmast, came to anchor in the creek as we have narrated, just as the morning gun boomed from the Rock of Gibraltar, a felucca began to work out of the Bay of Algesiras. She was evidently a smuggler—one of those craft which take in cargoes at Gib. and land them on the coasts of Portugal, France, and Algeria, in spite of the Spanish guardacostas or revenue cutters.

These smugglers are always felucca-rigged, a style peculiar to the Mediterranean ; they are worked by sweeps as well as sails, and to be prepared for emergencies have always a heavy gun concealed under their netting ; and though the crew of the felucca referred to were chiefly Spanish, or rogues of several nations, she had a dingy Union Jack displayed, and was bound for the coast of Tangiers.

On board of her as passengers were those who might have found themselves in an awkward predicament had any complications arisen between her skipper, Manuel Pinto, and the officers of a guardacosta : these were Rowland Stanley and his friends Neddy Knollys and Joe Trevor. The former had been refused leave for England ; but with the other two, having got some good-natured friends to take their guards, and so forth, had four days accorded them to shoot on the opposite coast.

With Stanley it was anything to kill time, and avoid the growing emotions of anger and mistrust, where love and implicit trust should have been ; and doubtless—so he hoped, or flattered himself—a letter from Milly explaining all would await him when he returned to head-quarters.

There were no tigers to pot or hogs to spear, as when the regiment had been in India; but in a craving for sport or excitement of some kind, our friends took advantage of a passage in the smuggling boat to have a day or so with their double-barrelled rifles among the zebras, antelopes, or anything else that came in their way; and Manuel Pinto was to pick them up on his return.

The personal appearance of the capitano and that of all his crew was pretty much the same.

He was a powerfully-built man, with a brown face reddened by constant exposure to the sun and sea-breeze. His massive silver earrings were almost hidden by the masses of his black and tangled hair. The expression of his face belied his nation, as it was rather ferocious. His teeth were white and strong, his eyes black and bright. His hands were brown and muscular; his breast was bare and brawny. The former were tattooed in gunpowder with anchors and rings; on the latter were a cross and the initials of his wife. His crew were all bushy-whiskered fellows, with red sashes round their waists, and in these were stuck, not ostentatiously, knives of that kind cutlered at Albacete in Murcia; and some of them had their hair gathered in net-bags, like the fishermen of Barcelona.

There was a great motion in the water, owing to the severe storm of the preceding night; thus, as they cleared the Bay of Algesiras and the towering rock-fortress rose high in air, the felucca alternately rose on one wave to sink deeply between two, rolling heavily the while, though she was not before the wind.

The morning was still dark; thus, when the gun was fired that announced the first streak of dawn far away over the sterile isle of Alboran—the home of the sea-birds—it flashed like a red flame out of the black port-hole.

"El cielo esta cargado de nubes, senhor," said Manuel to Stanley; "las nubes san muy espesos."

"What the devil is all that?" asked Joe Trevor.

"He says the weather is very dark and hazy, and that the clouds are very thick."

"We can see that for ourselves."

The wind was light as the sun rose, and the sail into the straits was very pleasant; ere long the wind fell so greatly

that the huge canvas of the felucca began to flap lazily, and then, running out their long sweeps with two men to each, the crew betook them to pulling.

The three officers had with them an ample picnic basket of creature comforts, which had been packed for them by the mess-man ; and as they shared their brandy and tobacco freely with Pinto and his cut throat-looking crew, they speedily became popular with them ; and still more so when, throwing off their coats and rolling up their shirt-sleeves, like sturdy young Englishmen as they were, they took a tough spell at the sweeps.

Stanley's chief idea in crossing the straits to shoot was simply to kill time, as we have said ; but he also hoped to get a spotted hyena's skin, or so, for Milly—it would be a pretty trophy to present to her ; and perhaps Knollys had some such idea about his pretty cousin, the little widow at Hampton Court.

Free from the monotonous trammels of military duty, the trio were in a high state of hilarity. The morning, when the clouds dispersed, became piping hot ; the blue and shining sea lay around them like a sheet of heaving crystal. Exhilarated by their surroundings and the rarity of the atmosphere, the young fellows were full of boisterous fun. Trevor trolled out songs ; Stanley perpetrated some very stupid *bonmots*, and Knollys made mad bets. Thus their general jollity astonished the somewhat grave and taciturn crew of the felucca, who made responsive grins and showed all their teeth, which always seemed so white by contrast with their swarthy complexions.

"Well, Rowland," said Trevor, inflating his lungs to the full by a deep respiration, after he had relinquished his sweep, and lying back on a heap of tarry sails with a cigar between his teeth, "isn't this better than being cooped up in Gib, yonder? Only think of being on the guard at the North Front on a day like this, in a wigwam such as the guard-house is, a mile from the foot of the Rock, two officers, three non-coms, and fifteen privates, sweltering in full harness, with nothing to do but watch an occasional funeral and kill flies till the field-officer of the day comes—most mild of excitements !—or visiting the posts round by the East Beach

and the Devil's Tower. It *is* a tiresome place," continued Joe; "and if I wasn't kept out of a nice property by an unnatural relation, I should send in my papers and hook it."

"Who's your relation—is he a lawyer?"

"Not at all, Stanley. He is an uncle, who seems determined to live a most unconscionable time, and stints my allowance horribly."

"Society in Gibraltar is slow certainly," said Knollys; "save when a new regiment comes out, there is always the same set over and over again."

"It doesn't seem to have improved you."

"How, Joe?"

"Because you don't pass the bottle after helping yourself."

"You are a goose."

"Perhaps so; but like that noble peer, the Lord Ogleby, I know my own failings too well to be severe on those of *others*."

"Don't insult your superior officer, but pass the bottle, Joe."

"We shall hit nothing to-morrow, if we begin with our tipple so early to-day."

"What's the odds if we don't? We chiefly come away to be jolly," said Trevor; "for here we can snap our fingers at the old commandant, the colonel, the world, the flesh, and the devil. Novelty and fresh faces are as necessary to me as fresh air."

"Well, you have a choice of rather foul face, to judge from the unwashed *marineros* of this gallant felucca."

"What are you dreaming of, Stanley? You are not going to relapse into your old kind of general out-of-sort-ishness—eh?" exclaimed Trevor.

Stanley only laughed and lit a fresh cigar, but kept his thoughts to himself. His mind had been wandering off to Milly, and into the endless ramifications a subject so tender and attractive was sure to lead a soul so imaginative as his; besides, when their banter was exhausted, he felt rather disposed to muse. They were more than half-way over now. The Rock of Gibraltar had lessened greatly astern, and the Moorish coast was rising fast, and becoming more distinct and clear in all its features; and when the evening sun began

to redden the straits, they were so close in, that they could see without their glasses the palm-trees, the groves, and people moving about on the beach, while they sat, or lounged, or lolled, smoking or drinking from time to time, talking of the garrison duties and abusing the barrack accommodation on "the Rock."

Trevor, who had been across once before, expressed fears of discomfort in the squalid Moorish café, at which they would have to put up for the night—full of dirty niggers smoking opium, and where nothing more soothing or refreshing could be had than kief or strong green tea.

"Man alive, think of our hamper!" said Knollys. "What are you grumbling about, Joe?"

"Well, its contents won't last for ever."

"We don't intend, I hope, to remain on this side of the strait for ever."

"See!" exclaimed Stanley suddenly, as a creek in the coast (along which the felucca was creeping under easy sail) suddenly opened—a pretty plain with a white sandy beach, some Arab huts, and pleasant groves of trees. "There is a smart cutter—quite like a Cowes yacht—at anchor, but with all her canvas loose and ready for sea."

We need scarcely say that the craft referred to was the *Wolf of Badenoch*, on board of which Fairway, with considerable anxiety, was awaiting the return of the party from the cascade.

The felucca was about two miles off the mouth of the creek.

"This is as good a place as any for us to land. Put us ashore here, Pinto," said Stanley.

"Bueno, senor," said the skipper; "but hold! what does that mean?" he exclaimed, in broken English, as the yacht ran up the British ensign *reversed*, and fired a gun.

"A signal of distress," said Stanley. "Out all the sweeps, Pinto, and stand straight into the bay."

The sheets were slacked off as the wind came more aft; all bent with a will to the sweeps, and at times the light felucca seemed to be actually lifted out of the water, till she came sheering alongside the cutter just as a boat, with an armed crew of eight men, put off from her side.

"Rifles and fixed bayonets!" exclaimed Stanley, with kindling eyes; "by Jove, this looks like work! Steer in for the little pier, Pinto."

"Si, si, senor."

"What cutter is that?" hailed Stanley to those in the boat.

"The *Wolf of Badenoch*, Royal Yacht Squadron," replied Fairway, who was accoutred with sword and pistol, to the hail, as he handled the yoke-lines, to lay the boat alongside the rude pier.

"The master the Hon. Mr. Comyn of the Royal Hussars?"

"The same, sir."

"What the devil is up? Why is that flag of distress flying?"

"If you'll join us on shore you'll deuced soon see!" was the hasty response of Fairway.

"Of course we shall; we are three officers on leave from Gibraltar."

"Then come, for God's sake, and welcome!"

Now a man in the boat, whom Stanley perceived for the first time—a man covered with dust, and whose clothes and face were spattered with blood, dressed like a sailor, but with the bearing of a gentleman—started up as the two craft came sheering alongside the pier, and exclaimed:

"Is that you, Stanley—Captain Stanley of the —th Regiment?"

"Yes, by Jove; and you—you are Larkspur of the Hussars?"

"The same," replied the other, who seemed so pale, breathless, blown, and disordered.

"Here in Africa! why, man alive, where have you dropped from—the moon? We have just run over—my friends Trevor and Knollys of ours—to have a little shooting."

"Pray Heaven we may be in time to save them!" cried Larkspur fervently.

"Save them! Save who?" asked Stanley, as they all scrambled ashore together.

"Is it possible you don't know?"

"Know what?"

"That a party of us sailed from Cowes in Badenoch's yacht—his wife, her sister, Mrs. Allingham and her daughter."

"No, no; and where are they? What does all this mean?"

"It means, Captain Stanley," said Fairway, "that in spite of my advice, the Master and his party would go picnicking in this infernal country; and they have been surrounded by a gang of the lawless natives somewhere inland. Now, major, we have not a moment to lose; please guide us all to where they are."

Stanley, Trevor, and Knollys joined Fairway's party; the former asking a hundred questions as they rushed breathlessly along the road under the guidance of Larkspur, just as the light of the day began to give place to that of the moon.

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## CHAPTER LII.

### A NARROW ESCAPE.

WE left the conflict going on near the cascade at a time when the little party of Englishmen were being taken in flank as well as in front, and so completely occupied with the work of defending themselves, that they had not time to cast a glance along the road to see whether the hoped-for aid was coming.

The evening was closing in, the musket-shots flashed out redly, and more than once the cry of a wild animal—a hyena probably—wailed upward from an adjacent thicket.

"When the darkness deepens they will rush upon us, and then we shall be murdered!" moaned Mrs. Allingham.

"There will be no darkness," replied the Master of Badenoch, adjusting himself at full length to take another steady aim. "The moon will be so brilliant, Mrs. Allingham, that its light will be in our favour."

He fired a single barrel, and a shriek of pain and rage informed them all that his shot had told. This Wimbledon mode of firing, by which head alone was exposed, puzzled and terrified their adversaries, to whom it was totally new.

The two seamen, who were armed with revolvers, emptied them too fast, and being bad marksmen, did so without avail. The assailants on the flank drew closer, and nearly at the same moment shot both down—one through the head, and the other through the heart. A crisis was at hand, for now

the odds were fearful—eleven men were opposed to three ; and when Fortnum received a flesh-wound in the left arm, there remained but two—the Master and Craven.

" By the Lord, sir," said the steward, with a groan of pain. " I shall be reduced to use my knife now," he added, opening it with his teeth, " and as a man and a Christian——"

" I don't feel much like either," exclaimed the Master, now pallid with rage and alarm, " but more like a devil or a Turk."

" Here they come closer on us to starboard !"

" If we had not had the ladies with us, we might have made a running fight of it to the beach ; our breech-loaders gave us such an advantage," said Craven, by the discharge of his two barrels winging, but not completely disabling two of the five who were attacking them, on the flank, and thus gaining a little more time.

But aid was coming on.

The thought that one so dear to him was so near and in such deadly peril inspired Stanley with the wildest excitement, and moments there were when he felt and seemed quite beside himself, as the party proceeded with all speed along the road.

" In Africa—Milly in Africa !" he kept repeating ; for in all his strangest flights of fancy such an eventuality had never occurred to Stanley.

" Is it not some wild delusion—some distorted and hideous dream ?" thought he ; but there was Larkspur, pale, worn, and bloody, the messenger of alarm and war ; " Milly in the hands, perhaps completely at the mercy, of lawless wretches such as Barbary Moors !"

Soldiers, like sailors, are accustomed to sudden situations, emergencies, and dangerous contingencies ; but the present was an event beyond all calculation, in these times of peace and good order.

" It is like some of our work among the hills in Bhotan," said Joe Trevor.

" Yes ; and the Conyers girls are, as I told you, the sisters of little Wickets, who died ere we fell back on the plains of Assam."

" By Jove, yes ! And the Miss Allingham of whom Major

Larkspur spoke with such *empressement*, and the skipper too —who is she?"

"Get on—on, on; she is Miss Allingham," replied Stanley a little incoherently.

"Pretty?"

"She is downright lovely!" exclaimed Fairway, the yacht captain, angrily; "but instead of talking let us push on, for Heaven's sake!"

"What distance have we to go, major?" asked Stanley feverishly.

"About three miles now."

"God help them! Come on, lads, come on!" cried Stanley, who gradually got in advance of the whole party.

His brother officers, Trevor and Knollys, could not understand this extreme agitation on his part, though Larkspur, who remembered certain passages and circumstances at Thaneshurst and Brighton, did so to some extent: they could only know that English folks were in some tribulation; that English girls, and pretty ones too, were in great danger; and *that* was enough for them.

The habitual self-control so dear to the native-born Englishman, and the intense detestation of what is called a scene, were all thrown to the winds now, and Stanley was excited. He was furious, but when he spoke he could scarcely recognise his own voice.

"Beg pardon, sir," said a yachtsman, who was armed with a rifle and bayonet, as he touched his hat; "but, Captain Stanley, don't you remember *me?*"

Stanley stared at the sailor vacantly, and seemed too preoccupied to inquire or reply.

"I'm Bill the foretopman, as was with you in the *Queen* when she was wrecked off the Azores."

"Oh—Bill—yes; could I forget you and the awful time we had of it on the bunk? Excuse me; but I am rather bewildered now," he added, shaking the seaman's hard brown hand. "And so you belong to the yacht now?"

"Yes, sir, and a lovely little craft she is; none better out of Cowes or Ryde, either on a wind or before a wind, and answers her helm, so that one might turn her round on a sixpence."

But Stanley was two full of his own terrible thoughts to share in his newly-found friend's enthusiasm about the cutter, or even to express satisfaction at meeting him, and only muttered:

"On, on; let us get on!" adding in thought, "Can all this be reality? Half an hour ago I knew nothing of it;" for again, as when drifting on the wreck with Bill the topman and the other seaman, he felt as if the present episode was but a wild and miserable dream.

The sun had long since set, its last red rays had faded away from the snowy peaks of the Atlas chain, but the moon shone brightly out, filling with silver light the scattered groves of cork-trees and evergreen oaks. The occasional cry of a wild animal rang out upon the stilly ambient air, but ere long other sounds began to be heard.

"That is firing—shots!" exclaimed Stanley.

"By Jove, the plucky fellows are at it yet!" cried Larkspur.

"Get on, get on!" was the response of all; though breathless and blown—especially the yachtsmen, who were but little used to this mode of progression—all now broke into a more rapid run.

Soon after yells and shrieks were heard; then the red flashes of rifles and pistols seemed to streak the silver moonlight; and on crowning a ridge in rear of the attacking miscreants, the succouring party, sixteen in all, came rushing with a fierce cheer to the rescue, just as the conquerors closed in upon their intended victims.

Craven and the Master of Badenoch, struck down by the butts of clubbed muskets, would soon have been despatched by the poniard, and poor Jack Fortnum too; but the sudden appearance of Fairway's band upon the scene, when all but too late, changed the aspect of affairs.

A powerful half-clad Spaniard, of singularly forbidding aspect—doubtless an escaped *galeote*—had slung his musket, and grasping Milly by both her hands, which seemed as those of a child in his hard and muscular grip, was dragging her away, with a knife clenched between his teeth.

"Mamma—darling mamma!" she exclaimed, in a voice of despair. A gleam of indignant anger mingled with the expres-

sion of terror in her eyes, there was a nervous, yet muscular, movement of her slender white throat, indicating a stifled sob of horror and dread of—she knew not what to come.

"A thousand *duros*," shouted the Spaniard, "or we shall throw her into the cascade!"

Poor Mrs. Allingham, rushing wildly after the captor of her daughter, fell fainting and breathless on the rocky way, and hence saw not the coming aid, led by the impetuous Fairway, who, dropping on one knee, took a steady aim with a musket, and shot the Spaniard through the chest.

He fell wallowing in blood, and Milly lay beside him, senseless, utterly overcome by the whole affair, and knew not that she was in the arms of Stanley, who for a moment felt envious of Fairway, to whose hands Milly owed her immediate safety; for the Spaniard, on finding himself baffled, was quite capable of using his knife.

The rest of the gang had fled into the bush; and but for the presence of two or three dead bodies, some arms scattered about, the star-studded rock, which the flattened bullets had struck, and which actually glittered in the moonlight, the whole episode might have been deemed a mere fancy; for all now was still, the rush of the falling cascade at a little distance and the stertorous breathing of the wounded Spaniard, from whose broad and brawny chest the untended blood was welling, alone being heard.

Partially stunned by the blows they had received, the Master and Craven now staggered up. Fanny and her sister, though both for a time paralysed by the terror of a scene beyond their calculation altogether, soon recovered themselves; but not so Milly; over whose pale face Stanley hung with what emotions may be guessed, while his blood ran cold at the idea of what might have occurred had their succour been five minutes too late in arriving.

## CHAPTER LIII.

### JUST IN TIME.

"WHY, Badenoch, this has been a devil of an affair!" exclaimed Stanley. "But what brought you here?"

"The yacht."

"The yacht, of course; but why to such a place?"

"The 'Roving Englishman' goes to the Nile and even to India now; besides, you know my tastes are eccentric. But, as we are in the mood for questioning, may I ask where *you* fellows have dropped from?"

"There is nothing remarkable in our being here. We took a run across the straits to have a little shooting; and seeing the flag of distress flying on the cutter anchored beside her in the creek, and so are here."

"You were just in time, gentlemen," said Craven.

"And now I think we should get the ladies on board without delay," said Fairway.

The eight seamen from the yacht, with the three officers from Gibraltar, were quite ready to carry them in impromptu litters or any way; but Craven and the Master of Badenoch would almost be required to be carried too, so severely had they been handled in the fray. Mrs. Allingham and her daughter were quite helpless still; rest, shelter, at least for the night, was deemed most necessary; but where was it to be procured?

Here was a dilemma.

Stanley's eye suddenly fell on the wounded Spaniard. Seizing him by the throat he gave him a violent shake, and asked him if there was any farmhouse, *quinta*, or khan in the neighbourhood.

"O senores, por el amor de Madre de Dios, aunque mi alma se condene!" whined the fellow. ("O gentlemen, for the love of the Mother of God, kill me!")

"Speak!" said Stanley furiously, as he put the cold muzzle of a pistol to his forehead.

"Madre de Dios, ay de mi!" he gasped.

"We shall dress your wounds—speak, or *presto!* we shall send you back to the galleys at Ceuta, whence no doubt you came."

"O senor, it was not I who robbed the Posada del Sol at Tarifa, but Pedro—Pedro only," he added, as his mind wandered to some alleged crime.

"Who the devil says you did!" said Fairway, giving him a push with the butt of his rifle as if he were a dying reptile. "Is there any house hereabout?"

The Spaniard pointed with his hand, and fell back exhausted.

"I can see a house over there in the moonlight," said Joe Trevor.

"Where?"

"See—its walls shine whitely out against the green of a thicket, about a quarter of a mile off."

"Some of the scoundrels who attacked us may live there?" suggested the Master.

"But there are sixteen of us now, and we are all armed," urged Knollys. "But what is the Spaniard muttering now?" he added.

"He says that it is a khan or café for merchants and others proceeding between Ceuta and Tangiers," said Stanley.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Fairway; "that is the very place for us; so let us make our way thither at once."

Stanley now turned all his attention to Mrs. Allingham and her daughter.

"Milly!" was the first utterance of the former, as she struggled back into consciousness.

"She is safe, and by your side," said Stanley.

"I am here, dearest mamma," murmured a soft voice that thrilled through Stanley's heart.

As she revived, there came swiftly back, with returning recollection, the last emotion, when she had fainted in the fierce strong grasp of that dreadful-looking Spaniard; thus, an expression of rage and despair blended with the pride of a brave and defiant nature, resolute to the last point of human endurance; and when her eyes looked again she saw, not those of the crime-stained *galeote*, but of Rowland Stanley, as he raised her from the ground.

Eager though he was for a brief embrace full of love and tenderness, he could but take her hands in his and gaze into her eyes; then he kissed her on the forehead and on her hair, like a brother or old friend. Before so many strange eyes, even in that time of high excitement, he dared do no more; and the *empressement* of this was lessened by his saluting Mrs. Allingham in the same manner.

"O heavens! mamma, among those who have saved us is Rowland—Stanley—Captain Stanley!" she exclaimed.

"Do say Rowland only," he whispered.

"I should not have known you but for your voice," said she, weeping hysterically.

"Why, Milly?"

"You are so altered—so bearded, brown, and sunburned."

They gazed for a moment or two into each other's eyes, and were reading there volumes of sorrow and trial; but the Master, who had both his eyes blackened in a most unpicturesque manner, and was otherwise smarting from many blows and bruises, exclaimed,

"Now, Stanley, we really have no time for loitering or explaining. Give your arm to Miss Allingham, and lead the way to this confounded khan, café, or whatever it is. Come on, gentlemen — I wish my cuts dressed without delay."

Thus urged, the whole party set off towards the house in question, leaving the slain marauders lying in the moonlight, where doubtless the wild animals would soon find them; but two seamen of the yacht brought on the Spaniard, whose wound was dressed by a pad on his breast, after which he was left in the yard of the café to his fate. When looked for, an hour after, he had vanished, none knew where or how; but the evil result of not making him a prisoner was found before many hours were past.

That aid should come to them in their direst extremity and peril was a cause for the purest thankfulness and joy; that with it should come Stanley seemed something short of miraculous to Milly and her mother. In the rapidity and horror of its details the whole episode through which they had passed might have seemed like a dream, but for their surroundings, the wounds of Larkspur and the steward, and the ugly bruises exhibited by Craven and the Master of Badenoch, whose affectionate little wife chirruped about him, hanging on each arm alternately, and laughing almost wildly in the excess of her joy, after the agitation she had undergone.

Rescued from deadly peril as they had been — more especially with the advent of Stanley and his friends—to Milly it was like being the heroine of a three-volume novel—a romance; and he and Trevor and Knollys seemed such

dear, delightful, handsome fellows, all of them. It would be something to talk about for ever.

"I never liked ugly men, Captain Stanley—I *must* call you so here," urged Milly plaintively; "but, oh, the face of that Spaniard will ever haunt me—it was very awful as he clutched me."

"It was not seen very advantageously," replied Stanley, who listened to all she said with delight.

"And you dear, dear Captain Fairway, how can I ever—ever——"

"Don't mention my little service, Miss Allingham," said the sailor.

"Do you call it little? Another moment and he might have stabbed me!" she exclaimed with a pretty tragic air, while her eyes dilated; and then she turned again to Stanley, and when their gaze met there was in both that expression which the young and loving never fail to recognise; and the old—ah, they must be old indeed when they forget it! Fairway read the expression as eye met eye, and he thought with a sigh,

"She *is* a genuine brick, this girl; and what would I not give to see her look thus at *me?* But here we are at the khan."

## CHAPTER LIV.

### THE MOORISH KHAN.

AMID all the excitement of this affair Stanley had displayed remarkable coolness and presence of mind. Though a young man, he was somewhat of an old soldier. He had seen many deaths, from all manner of wounds and suffering, even by poisoned arrows among the Bhotanese in the far East, beyond the vast plains of Assam; so he could look more coolly on such an episode as the last than our three Hussars, and yet they had shown plenty of pluck.

As the party made their way towards the khan, Stanley thought how strange, yet how delightful, it was to feel the hand of Milly resting, with just the gentlest pressure, on his arm—a pressure that ere long increased with growing confidence. Where had she last taken his arm? At Thanes-

hurst, of course ; but when or under what circumstances, he failed to remember now. To her he was the same handsome and willing Stanley as ever. His forehead was white, she thought ; but the sun of the tropics had tanned and reddened his cheeks and neck. His fine crisp hair was shorn short, and his moustache stuck out with a fierceness which his tender and gentle eyes, ever so frank and dear, belied.

Fairway, who was assisting Mrs. Allingham, looked on the pair with irrepressible interest.

Knowing, or suspecting the wealth of Milly, we do not suppose that honest Frank Fairway had indulged in any dreams beyond those of admiration ; at least we hope not for his own peace, for he saw but too well, when she met Stanley, "how the land lay, how the wind blew," and all the rest of it. He could but sigh, twist up a cigarette, and think of his duty.

The khan was a huge rambling dwelling, very like a Spanish posada, the lower story being entirely open, as accommodation for horses or camels. The upper, which was supported on wooden columns, was reached by a species of stair that was like a ship's side-ladder, and was divided into several bare, but not unclean or untidy, apartments opening off a *sala* or public room, in which a large lamp was now flaming.

The landlord, a white-turbaned Moor of most respectable aspect, received his guests with many low genuflections, and not without a bearing that betokened some alarm. He saw that they were all well armed, and he must have heard the firing and general row that had gone on in his vicinity for most of the past day. However, whatever fears he had were allayed when informed, in a polyglot mixture of English, mingled with such Spanish and Arabic as are to be picked up in Gibraltar, that a few hours' rest for the ladies alone was wanted ; and to attend upon these came his wife, who had a face more like a huge shrivelled fig than anything else in this world.

She surveyed her four lady visitors with wonder and curiosity—it might be with envy and hate, they looked so dazzlingly fair by comparison with herself, so soft, and so unlike anything human—according to her Tangerian ideas of humanity—she had ever seen before.

"Huespada hermosa mal para la bolsa," said Joe Trevor, with the most impudent wink, airing his Gibraltar-Spanish proverb, which means, "a handsome hostess is had for the purse."

A couple of Moorish girls were the chief attendants. In the khan were to be had new wine, which the Moors drink burnt, thinking thereby to evade the law of the Prophet; a liquor made with honey and dates, and goat's milk in plenty; and there were placed on the table platters of cakes, quinces, and red grapes, so large that they are called hen's eggs.

The keeper's wife was a very old woman of Fez, and had her eyebrows blackened and her nails dyed red. Her feet were bare, and being painted yellow, presented a curious contrast to her loose habit or dress, which was spotless white.

The yachtsmen were all grouped together in one room, where they made themselves comfortable (as they lolled on the floor, for seats they had none) with a jolly jar of the country wine and the contents of their tobacco pouches. Poor Larkspur, whose wounded hand gave him great pain, had the member dressed by Craven as well as circumstances would permit, and Fortnum's scar was patched up in the same hasty fashion.

"Ah, Captain Fairway," exclaimed Mrs. Allingham, with a sigh of relief, as she threw off her bonnet and shawl, "I shall never forget the scene of horror we have witnessed to-day."

"Yes; two good fellows have lost the number of their mess, and the major and Jack Fortnum have both been winged. But after all, Mrs. Allingham, worse than all this happens in the good city of London every night."

"In London, Captain Fairway?"

"Yes. Think of the murders, parricides, suicides, and robberies with which the morning papers teem, to say nothing of the wives belaboured with pokers, or jumped upon by Anglo-Saxons, as they boast themselves, in wooden clogs. So we may well expect a little shindying here, where every man goes armed to the teeth, and there are neither City nor Metropolitan police."

When Milly was asleep on a couch, and the other ladies

also—thanks to the overwhelming excitement of the past day—Stanley joined the Master, who with Trevor, Knollys, Craven, and the major were seated on stools and inverted tubs, and so forth, in the upper verandah, enjoying the brilliant moonlight, viewing the wooded scenery in the foreground, the Atlas chain towering in the distance, and twisting up cigarettes, and talking of "the row," as they called it, and sometimes "shop," as they were all in the service.

"So the gallant Stanley has prevailed upon himself to leave the ladies at last," said Trevor.

"Come along, old man," said the Master of Badenoch. "By jingo, now for a quiet weed and a soothing smoke. Who's got some cavendish and a match?—thanks, Craven. Any bitter beer in your hamper, Fortnum?"

"A bottle or two, and some moselle, sir."

"Good; let us have it all, for I don't think the old Moor's wine is drinkable. I wish, Fairway, we had taken your advice this morning, and not come to see their infernal cascade. By Jove, what a game of brutality, and all that sort of thing, we've been engaged in, don't you know?"

"But," replied Fairway, "there is no use in quoting what Byron calls the world's bad Amen, 'I told you so.'"

"Well, Larkspur, old boy, how do *you* feel?" asked the Master, emitting a cloud of smoke through his moustache.

"Feel?"

"Yes; after all this work, I mean."

"I feel as if I had been out all night boozing," replied the major; "'pon my soul I do."

"Ah, we all look queer," lisped Craven, as he drained a bumper of moselle; "we should not gain the applause of Hyde Park or the admiration of Piccadilly."

"These dusky devils have spoilt my pistol-practice and billiard-playing for many a day," said Larkspur. "I shall never make eight or nine cannons running again.—Another glass of Moselle, Fortnum. Is your wound smarting?"

"Yes, sir," replied the steward, making a wry face.

"By Jove, your mushrooms *en surprise*, with a *purée* of game, were most excellent at luncheon to-day; but we've had a surprise of another kind," laughed the major.

"And likely to have more of it!" exclaimed the steward,

suddenly pausing in his attendance. "Look, sir! Look, gentlemen! Who are these?"

At this exclamation all started to their feet, and looked about them. In the brilliant moonlight it seemed at first as if the shadows of the palms, oaks, and various other trees that grew near the khan were playing a silvery game of light and darkness in the soft wind that sang through them. But almost instantly those wavering outlines became distinct and defined, and were seen to be men—Arabs or Moors, black-faced, black-legged, with dresses and turbans chiefly of white; and by the flash of steel that came at times from among them, it was also but too apparent that they were armed.

They seemed to be between twenty and thirty in number, and, pausing near the stems of some trees, appeared to be in consultation; for the figures of the smokers could be seen in the balcony or verandah.

"Why, gentlemen, cuss my top-boots and breeches!" cried the boatswain of the yacht, hurrying out; "here's a whole regiment of these niggers surrounding us. This here is likely to be an ugly lark, sir," he added, touching his hat to Fairway and the Master of Badenoch.

Directed by the sound of his voice, a musket was aimed at him. It flashed redly out in the moonlight; the ball whistled past the boatswain's ear, and entered the plank of wood behind with a dull thud. But ere the report had died away, every Briton in the khan had rushed to arms, and was ready to defend himself; and the verandah was instantly vacated, and the light in the room off which it opened was extinguished by Fairway.

"Who are these scoundrels?" asked Stanley of their Moorish landlord, who seemed to have turned a pea-green colour in the moonlight.

"They are thieves—cattle-lifters; more of the same tribe who came with Ben Targa to attack you at the cascade."

"And they now come for revenge?"

"Yes," said the Moor, smiling grimly.

It eventually was proved that they were inspired too by some very vague and exaggerated ideas of the contents of Jack Fortnum's hamper; and this, together with the lust of revenge and outrage, urged them to attack those whom they

had traced to the khan—too probably on the information of the wounded Spaniard.

Roused by the musket-shot and the yells without, the ladies had started up in tears and terror; for to people who had passed all their years in ease and pleasure, who had never looked firmly on life or faced death, the whole situation was undeniably a terrible one.

Ben Hamo, the Emperor of Morocco's general, had full twenty thousand regular troops in the field operating against these predatory marauders and hill-tribes; but he was far away, in the neighbourhood of Algarb and the northern provinces, and no aid could be looked for from him.

The whole situation was replete with the deadliest peril to all the party, who had now fully to learn that it is

> "A stern and terrible thing to think
> How often humanity stands on the brink
> Of its grave without any misgiving."

These Moorish outlaws had not as yet made a more hostile attack upon the khan; but as they drew nearer, their dark mahogany skins and snowy turbans or scarlet fezzes, their glossy black faces and white shining teeth, their crispy beards and brandished weapons, were all seen distinctly, together with their motions, leapings, and mocking gestures; while their hootings, yellings, and hisses sounded like the production of fiends. They were, as the boatswain said, like so many Ojibbeways well primed with rum and gunpowder; or, as Fairway, who had served in Peel's Naval Brigade, added, like the Sepoy mutineers drunk with opium and *bhang*.

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## CHAPTER LV.

### THE ATTACK.

IN a startled and terrified group the ladies now clung together, while their male defenders took post, by twos and threes, at the various upper windows of the khan, thus giving the edifice the aspect of being full of men.

"Captain Stanley," said Milly imploringly, "keep near us if you can."

"In doing so my services would be lost to-night, and we cannot spare a man," said he. "Keep back and out of sight, ladies; for shots will be exchanged directly."

"O Mr. Fairway," moaned Milly; "we shall all be slain now—cruelly slain."

"Miss Allingham, I don't think so—if tough fighting can save you, I mean," he replied, with a flush on his cheek that none could see, for there was no light now in or about the khan save that of the moon. "Anyway, a man can only die once, whether it be for glory or duty—or, better than either, *beauty*," he added, as he lightly touched her hand.

"What is that they are shouting so incessantly?" asked Stanley of the khan-keeper.

The latter hesitated.

"Speak out, and fear not," urged Stanley.

"I may frighten the women."

"You won't frighten *me*. Well?"

"That they will send your ears to the ship, and, if not ransomed, they will keep your heads, as they are all in arms against Ben Hamo and the Sultan. I shall go to the kaid of the province for succour."

"How far is he from this?"

"Two leagues."

"You will go truly?"

"Yes, aga."

"Fifty English gold pieces are yours, if you bring us aid in time."

"If I fail?"

"Then you won't get the fifty pieces," said Stanley.

"Why, aga?"

"Because we shall either be dead or not here to pay it."

"On my head be it!"

"Away, then, and God speed you!"

The Moor disappeared on his errand.

"Take courage, Mrs. Allingham," said Stanley; "he has gone to get troops from the kaid, and we meanwhile must defend ourselves as best we can."

"Troops!" said Fairway. "He is a deuced deal more likely to bring another gang of rascals."

"We can but hope for the best."

"And fight to the death!" cried Fairway, with enthusiasm, as the report of four or five muskets fired in quick succession rang upon the night; and with the aid of the boatswain and Bill the topman he tore up and utterly destroyed the wooden stairs or ladder leading from the lower story, closed the trap-door, and placed over it all the heaviest articles they could find. By this time the eight yachtsmen, Stanley, and his two comrades, with their double-barrelled rifles, and the Master and Craven, had all opened a sputtering fire, right and left, at the assailants, many of whom, after darting forward to fire, shrank behind the stems of trees to reload.

"Aim well and surely, men," cried Stanley, whose blood was fairly up now; "be careful of your ammunition, for our lives depend upon it. Make every shot tell surely."

As the assailants were in the full light of the moon, they were more exposed, and at a disadvantage; while the defenders of the khan could fire from the shadow of the darkened rooms —a shadow in one place made much deeper by a verandah without. Now and then a shriek rang out upon the air, showing that a bullet had found its billet, and here and there a Moor lay dead on his face or back, and others were seen crawling away, wounded and bleeding. Their balls came with thudding or crashing sounds into the timber-work of the khan; but after nearly an hour's skirmishing not one of the defenders had been hit. But now the assailants adopted a new mode of attack.

Some of them succeeded in getting into the under story of the edifice, and began to fire at random up through the floor; thus putting the ladies in great peril, as when a ball came ripping up the planks in one place, they fled to another, only to be compelled to leave it too; until the Master conducted them to the sleeping apartments of the edifice—some little dingy dens above, to which access was given by a common ladder.

While a skirmish was maintained with those outside, who skipped nimbly from tree to tree, a sound like thunder was now heard below, as several athletic fellows—using a long piece of timber, which they had found, as a species of battering-ram, poising it together, and hurling it again and again with all their united strength—strove to burst up the floor.

By means of this they succeeded in making a great breach in the centre of the principal room, for a mass of the planks, being old, worm-eaten, and decayed, fell down on them ; and though half-blinded by the dust, they piled up boxes, barrels, and bales, endeavouring on the top of these to fight their way upward into the heart of the fortress.

To defend this unexpected breach many of the windows were abandoned. Thus the whole of the attacking force got into the lower story ; and though the bayonets of the yachtsmen were for a time most effectual in defending the breach in the floor, it widened so fast, by means of planks giving way, that a retreat to the next story became necessary ; and to this, as to a citadel, they retired about midnight, Stanley and Knollys covering the movement by a volley from their four barrels, and then scrambling up the narrow stair, as a horde of Moors, like black yelling fiends, came pouring upward through the hole in the floor. The attacking force had evidently gained such an accession of numbers that our friends began to have serious fears that the keeper of the khan had indeed deceived them, and brought, instead of troops from the kaid, a reinforcement to the enemy.

The firing upward and downward was now concentrated about the very narrow staircase that led to the upper story. Many attempts were made to storm it by the now infuriated Moors, those in front being pushed on by those in rear, till the fixed bayonets of Fairway's men hurled them down with such dreadful wounds in their faces and breasts that ere long their ardour began to cool, and they began to see the impossibility of storming a narrow way defended by so many men, well armed, resolute, and who had added to their means of defence by building a barricade of mattresses and pillows, from behind which they could fire securely down on those below.

The assailants were evidently in consultation as to what was to be done next. Save the moans and cries of the wounded, all was comparative silence below ; and the besieged began to hope the attack was about to be abandoned, that the danger was passing away, and they might yet reach the yacht in safety after all. Four long hours had this conflict been waged ; not one of their party had been hit ; and the ladies had got so used to the danger that they began to

gather courage, more especially as day was at hand, as Fanny's bracelet-watch informed them.

If succour was coming, as Stanley suggested, it should have been there by that time; but what could the fellows below be about?

Removing a portion of the barricade, Fairway endeavoured to peep down, and at that moment a shot was fired that gave him a dreadful wound in the head—fired evidently by a man who was a European wearing a scarlet fez. He uttered a sharp cry of pain, and sank back, covered with blood, in the arms of Larkspur; and then again, as if but a new incentive to slaughter were wanted, the attack and defence of the little staircase was resumed with greater fury than ever. But Fairway's accident had fortunately taught the besieged caution, and to expose themselves as little as possible.

While shouts and yells and the report of muskets and pistols rang fiercely out once more, Fairway was laid on a pallet, and by the light of the waning moon his friend and patron the Master, endeavoured to dress the wound and stanch the blood. But in vain; the ball had passed somewhere near the base of the brain, and though perfectly sensible, with a sad smile on his face, the poor fellow was evidently sinking fast; and in the gentleness of his nature, even in his sore extremity, he looked kindly and gratefully in the pale faces of the four ladies, who wrung their hands in sorrow around the pallet on which he lay.

It was on Milly's face, as the day stole in, that his eyes chiefly rested. They were bloodshot and glazed, and his tongue nervously played upon dry and feverish lips to moisten them.

Once again the attack on the staircase was resumed, though the defenders stuck to their post with undiminished vigilance, and amid the temporary silence the now quavering and feeble voice of Frank Fairway was heard.

"Pray for me, dear Miss Allingham," said he; "I don't know very well how to do so myself. I have not been a very bad fellow, but somehow praying isn't quite in my line. Pray for me when I am gone, and remember that a time must come —long, long may it be in coming!—when like me—you—you will be waiting——"

"For what, dear Captain Fairway?"

"To die."

"Do not say so!" urged Milly, her fine dark eyes welling up anew with tears; and, sooth to say, the terrors of the past day and night had made the eyelids of all the four pink as rose-leaves.

"I *am* dying, Miss Allingham—I know it and feel it—for I have seen too many die in my time, by land and sea; but I am prouder that I die, fighting for you, and serving *you*, than if I had died—as I was ever ready to do—for the Queen upon the throne!" he added, while the words came chokingly in his throat with the vehemence of his utterance, and his handsome and earnest, but now sadly wistful, eyes suffused for a moment with tears, only to become more glazed than ever. "Master—Master of Badenoch," said he, speaking with increasing difficulty, "I insured my life for my poor mother's sake; will—will *this* death cancel the policy?"

"I think not," replied the Master, clasping his hand. "Any way it matters little, my old friend—trust to *me*."

"And to me," added Stanley.

"God bless you both! But it is surely getting very dark—I cannot see."

After a time he sadly and tenderly lifted the hand of Milly to his lips, and died in the act of doing so.

As she withdrew it, there was blood upon her fair fingers, and she shuddered and wept as she covered her face; for this poor fellow, who had never said so, had in secret loved her.

To Milly, more than to Stanley, there was an awkwardness in this solemn manifestation of regard for her. But it was born of the terrible emergency, and, under less exciting circumstances, it might never have been shown; so both could but pity him.

"Poor Frank Fairway!" said the Master of Badenoch, as he spread a handkerchief over the dead man's face; "he deserved a better fate than to perish thus, and by such coward hands as these."

"Yet he has died bravely and well."

"Yes, Stanley; and his old mother, whom he idolised, must now be our care, Fanny."

But the attention of all was once more drawn to the occupants of the lower premises; who now resorted to a new and hitherto unthought-of mode of attack and revenge, which made the stoutest heart among the defenders die within him.

"Oh," moaned Mrs. Allingham, as she wrung her hands, "this is indeed a night to which there shall be for us no morning."

## CHAPTER LVI.

### A MEETING AT LINCOLN'S INN.

ON the same evening, when the moon was shining so brightly on the khan by the Ceuta road, with all its palms and orange-groves, the same "regent of the sky," but sorely shorn of her radiance, looked weirdly down at times, through mist and smoke, on the mighty dome and busy wilderness of London.

In the previous part of this history we have said that the day for Tom's trial had been fixed, and it was to come on with the fatal ordeal of many others who were all more guilty, but none more unfortunate. An able counsel was requisite, and to procure him funds were necessary. Mabel had come to the end of her little purse, but she clung desperately to the hope that Mr. Skeemes, the solicitor, might aid her in procuring one; and on this evening she had an appointment with him in his chambers at Lincoln's Inn.

As each morning had dawned on Mabel—dawned to announce to her that she *had* slept a little, out of pure weariness of heart—she began to feel the hope of the hopeless; that through the long, lonely, and dreary day to come, some lucky event—she knew not what or how—might happen.

She had long since parted with every atom of jewelry save her wedding-ring, which she hoped would be buried with her; so, even to procure food, she could not part with that. The last sovereign of Stanley's cheque had gone to the learned Skeemes, whose necessities and requisitions in Tom's case seemed a vortex capable of swallowing the Bank of England;

and Mabel once more saw grinding poverty staring her in the face.

She thought of Milly Allingham in her sore extremity, but in her pride of nature shrunk from dating a letter—a begging letter as it would undoubtedly be—from a street so humble as hers, to one whose knowledge of London eastwards ended at the Opera House and the lions in Trafalgar Square. But she knew not then that Milly had sailed with the gay party in the yacht, and still less could she know or conceive that about that very time Milly was in greater peril than herself.

Should she appeal to the old folks at Thaneshurst? No, no; it seemed worse than useless to do so. Baby's birth, and more than that its death—her "poor little, little darling baby!"—together with the tidings of Tom's great peril, had all failed to win attention from them; so there was nothing left for her but to endure all, even unto the bitter end.

Anon she would think, "Is it obduracy or pride, or both, that prevent me appealing once more to papa, to seek forgiveness from him and mamma? Forgiveness for what? For in what have I been so wicked?"

A poor emaciated and haggard creature, with care-troubled eyes, and clad in thin rags passed slowly near her, selling cigar-lights, amid the flaring light of a gin-shop, and Mabel shuddered and drew her shawl about her, as rain was now beginning to fall.

"Shall I ever become as one of these—utterly homeless?" she muttered, for she was already in arrear with her weekly rent to the landlady, and she thought with a dull sense of benumbing horror of all she had heard and read, of the thousands who in the vast metropolis are utterly without homes; who in summer sleep in the parks and fields, in the mews of stately mansions, on the staircases of legal chambers, in barges, or under arches by the river. From such a fate *she*, at least, would soon be rescued by death; and then she should be safe from the bitter world and all its buffeting, when she lay in a parish-coffin, buried in a fetid hecatomb, far apart from all her kindred, and even from Tom.

She had just mused herself into this sad and morbid state of mind, and was about to turn from the stir and bustle of

Oxford Street into the quietude of Lincoln's Inn, when she was doomed to experience the first insult to which she had ever been subjected in the streets of London.

Just as she passed a gin-palace or spirit-shop, which presented the usual glare of gas, reflected from resplendent marble, gilding, and plate-glass, two young men—who had too evidently been imbibing more than was good for them—came noisily and laughingly through the swing-doors, and in a moment the beauty of her pale little face attracted them.

"By Jove, a regular stunner!" exclaimed one; adding, as they placed themselves before her, "Does this street lead to Lincoln's Inn, please?"

"Yes, sir," she faltered; "but allow—"

"You to pass. Of course, my dear; but don't you know me? I have seen you so often—in the Soho Bazaar, I think, and—'

She did not hear what more he added as she darted past them: but they followed her, walking quite as fast as she did. She strove in vain to rid herself of them, and was loth, attended thus, to penetrate into the then solitude of Lincoln's Inn, fearing that when she left Mr. Skeemes's office she should find them on the watch for her.

Ignoring silently occasional remarks they made to her, each encouraging the other to bantering compliments and fresh impertinence, which made the poor girl's cheek redden with an indignation that had the effect of drawing her from her sorrow, while it filled her with terror, she continued to walk quickly on towards Chancery Lane, yet fearing to run, lest by doing so they might be tempted to overtake and actually grasp her.

Suddenly she turned up Serle Street—how she came there, in her terror, she could scarcely tell—and darted into a porch, where the shadow concealed her from view; and as the rain was falling now, she hoped they would not loiter so long as to keep her from her appointment with Mr. Skeemes.

She saw them at fault, pausing and looking about close by her, and her heart beat painfully.

"Why," thought she, "am I thus miserable? What have I done—what have *we* done, Tom and I?" and a moment,

but a moment only, an emotion of passionate rebellion to the will of Heaven sprang up in her heart.

"Sly little puss—where the deuce can she have got to?" said one. "What pretty ankles she had!"

"Perhaps she hangs out hereabout," suggested the other; "but she seems very poorly dressed."

"The goods and gear of this world are very ill divided."

"When I think of that, I am more inclined to swear than moralise."

They had the tone and bearing of well-bred young men, but had both imbibed enough to make them dangerous.

"Yes, d—n it!" hiccuped the last speaker; "as Brooks says, 'The fact that John Brown is starving in the cold, and the fact that Lady Clara Vere de Vere's Italian greyhound has a warm jacket,' prove how the goods are apportioned. Why should you, Jack, have a thousand a year, when I have just two hundred?"

Mabel had started and shivered on hearing her former name mentioned, but it was poor Shirley Brooks the speaker referred to.

"By Jove, here is our little beauty!" he exclaimed, as he darted into the porch and seized her by one of her wrists.

"Please, sir, to let me go—to leave me," she urged, and looked wildly round her for aid.

"Oh, I am not afraid of the police," said he, laughing.

"Have you fear of the devil?"

'Bah! who believes in the parson's patent screw?"

But now Mabel, overmastered by her fear and alarm lest her appointment might be a failure, burst away from them, and flew like a hare along Serle Street, with the rain beating in her face; and believing they were behind her, she fell—when just about to fall fainting—into the arms of a stout, white-haired old gentleman, who had then alighted from a four-wheeled cab. Encouraged by his years and general appearance, the girl clung to him, wildly exclaiming,

"Save me, sir! Save me, or I shall die!"

Her voice—that sweet voice with a singular chord in it—must have gone like an arrow to the heart of her hearer, whose arm tightened round her, as he cried in a voice like a sob,

"Mabel—my own girl, Mabel!"

Blurred with tears and sodden with rain, the sweet and pale but startled face was turned up for a moment to his.

"Papa!" was all she could gasp out, as she fainted on his breast, to the astonishment of the stolid cabby, who stood, whip in hand, patiently expectant of his fare.

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## CHAPTER LVII.

### WHAT FOLLOWED.

APROPOS of the visit of that distinguished functionary, Mr. William Weazle, to Thaneshurst, and the discovery of the missing notes in Alfred Foxley's repositories, Mr. Brooke, despite the objections of his better half, who urged that he should not mix himself up with such a person as Seymour in any way, had written to his solicitors to take the case in hand; and on this evening it chanced that he was paying them a second visit on the subject, when he encountered Mabel in her terror and distress.

So the lucky event—the mysterious something—of which Mabel had dreamed and hoped for at times, had actually happened at last. A double event as it proved; for now, after she recovered consciousness, she was to hear the story of the discovery made by Weazle, and of the wondrous villany of the still absent Foxley.

When Mabel recovered, she was in a kind of parlour or waiting-room, attached to the chamber of the solicitors, one of whom, with a fat smug face that never gave the smallest indication of what was passing in his mind, held a glass of wine to her lips, while she lay with her head pillowed on the breast of her father, when a good shower of tears proved her best and easiest relief.

Meanwhile he caressed her tenderly, and surveyed with sorrow, alarm, and a compunction that amounted to agony, her livid face—the face that men, and women too, had often turned and looked after—her haggard anxious eyes, her sodden and sordid dress, and its total absence of all ornament or set-off in the way of frill, ribbon, collar or gloves.

And this was the daughter he had so idolised, and for whom he had uselessly piled up his wealth! He reflected

that he had servants at Thaneshurst—Mulbery, Digweed, and Polly Plum—enjoying every comfort and luxury; horses in stall, of which old Pupkins took a fatherly care—there was not a nag in the stables but cost him more than would have saved from misery, it might be utter ruin, the poor girl whose petted pad had been sent from them in anger to Tattersall's. And *why* was all this, he asked of himself now, with something of indignation at "Martha dear," as he was beyond her influence then.

The solicitors, precious though their time, were human enough to leave father and child for a little space together. So they withdrew, the one with the smug face, and he whose legal mask was a stereotyped smiling one. As they retired, Mabel gave one hasty glance round the dingy wall, covered with faded paper of no particular pattern, the gas-jets without glasses, and the fly-blown almanacs, law-lists, and prospectuses of public companies that hung around her, together with a remarkably yellow map of London, and again hid her face in the breast of her father. To her eyes it seemed that his hair looked thinner, more silvery or like thistle-down, and that his face showed deeper lines than it was wont to do.

"And so, papa, you pardon me?" she whispered.

"I do, darling; I do!"

"And Tom too—my poor Tom!"

"I suppose I must, especially after all we know now."

"O papa, our case—Tom's and mine—was not to be judged by ordinary rules; a sore, sore pressure was put upon us."

"By whom or what—Fate?"

"No, papa."

"Who then?"

"By mamma," replied the girl reluctantly. "But, O papa," she added, with a wonderfully sweet intonation of voice, and as if she would never weary of addressing him in her old childlike way, "to think that Tom's innocence will be declared to all the world! Till to-night I have not been happy since —since—" she faltered and paused.

"Since you left me."

"No, papa, since—"

"When, my darling?"

"Since poor baby died."

"What baby, Mabel?"

"Mine! Is it possible you do not know, you have not heard that I had a baby once? But have none now—it is dead!"

Her tears were falling faster than ever now, and a dark frown gathered on her father's face.

"I have been deceived in some fashion—kept in the dark," he muttered.

"Perhaps if we had been possessed of more means to purchase better medical skill, it might have been preserved to us; but we were so poor, Tom and I. At such a terrible time as that," she continued, but very gently, "dear mamma should have remembered that, though indignant at Tom for making me his wife, I was not the less her child."

"I feel all your just rebuke, pet Mabel; but we were all in ignorance—"

"Yet Tom wrote to you, as in duty bound."

"His letter never reached me!"

"And, as no answer came, we thought your hearts must be steeled indeed against us, if even death—the death of one so dear to me as my little child—could win us no forgiveness."

"My darling," said her father, "do not let us upbraid each other; but let us forget the past by amending the future. I have searched for you long in vain, in many ways; and now I have found you, thanks be to God! When Tom Seymour robbed me of you, he robbed me of happiness alone; your mamma he deprived of happiness, and much more than that—he disappointed her ambition."

"I know that but too well. Mamma would have had me marry some one of her choosing—one whom I could neither love nor respect. Why should she debar me from that freedom of choice she herself had, when she chose *you*, darling? You would not have a girl, whose heart was true, give up the man whom she loved and had chosen in her heart for her husband, and who was every way irreproachable, because his fortune—or rather the want of it—displeased her family?"

"Enough, pet Mabel; we shall be happy in the time to

come, happy from this night. Thank Heaven, Tom is innocent; and it was while working in his cause I met you. He has been the victim—"

"Of a very fiend, papa!" exclaimed Mabel, with the first expression of anger her face had ever worn.

"Alf, my sister's son, who, when with me, was as decorous as the Archbishop of Canterbury; but from this night, Mabel, let us never, never name him more."

Mabel had read, or learned somewhere, that figures and the hard study of statistics, as folks have to study them in the atmosphere of Cornhill, went a long way to weaken the tender affections of the human heart, or to harden that necessary utensil; and she had been beginning to find this an excuse for her father. But now she had found the mistake of such a hypothesis, for his whole soul was full of paternal love for her—a love that was stronger now than ever.

Anxious to repair, so far as in him lay, the mischief that had been done, next morning Mr. Brooke—after leaving Mabel at a comfortable and fashionable hotel, surrounded by boxes of gloves and bonnets, mantles and costumes, &c., which an adjacent *modiste* had brought for her selection with wonderful celerity—set off with his solicitors for the prison where Tom Seymour yet remained in ignorance of the turn his affairs were taking. Even the lawyers were strongly impressed with the injustice that had been done him, though they were men having those pleasant and amiable views of life in general, and "society" in particular, the study of their profession is apt to inculcate, believing only in what they saw, and nothing that they heard, unless it could be turned into a monetary screw to extract cash from some one.

The mode in which the lawyers—the Ben Targas of Lincoln's Inn—employed by Mr. Brooke for Tom Seymour achieved the liberation and complete exoneration of the latter is somewhat apart from our general narrative. Suffice it to say that, after certain formulas had been gone through, Tom was soon free, happy, and honoured again; though Mabel could never, without a shudder, recall her sad and heart-breaking visits to the office of Mr. Skeemes, that legal horseleech; so he, thank Heaven, passes forthwith out of our humble story.

As there is no public prosecutor in England, Mr. Brooke had influence enough to get the turpitude of Alfred Foxley passed over, or somehow committed, so far as the world went, to oblivion. But for a long time to come that worthy found it necessary to favour certain German watering-places with his society, and to recruit his finances by industry, *i.e.* the closest study of all chances at cards and billiards, among those gaming-houses whose proprietary was a disgrace to the minor princes of Germany.

While enjoying all the happiness that perfect freedom and ample funds can give, his victims forgave or forgot him; though it was long ere Tom or Mabel could forget the general horrors of their late calamity: the foul and cruel accusation now explained away; the grim prison, with its odious garb, and all its crushing and infamous features and accessories, after which poor Tom was apt to be surprised, if not positively startled, to find at dinner a couple of solemn-faced men or attentive waiters, flitting like spectres at his beck with champagne, an *entrée*, a change of plates, and so forth.

But at last the time came when it all seemed like an ugly dream, or a tale that is told.

And now to return to those whom we left in such deadly peril a few pages back.

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

### TOGETHER AT LAST.

WE have said that the assailants of the khan resorted to an unthought-of mode of attack, or vengeance. This was *fire*.

Below, the alarming and unmistakable odour of burning wood became apparent; the crackling of flames was next heard, and a volume of smoke ascended the narrow staircase which the miscreants had failed to storm.

They had evidently collected timber, casks, and other lumber in the lower place, and set it all on fire to consume the edifice and all that were in it, and they watched the progress of destruction with yells and cries of savage exulta-

tion ; but fortunately for their intended victims, it was slower than they expected.

"Aid yet may come, and we must fight for our lives," exclaimed Stanley, while horror and anxiety began to mingle with despair in his heart, as he thought of Milly's too probable fate.

"We must retreat to the roof and remain there till relief comes—if it ever comes at all," said Larkspur.

"The roof—but how?" asked several.

"There is a trap-door—a hatchway here, gentlemen," said Bill the topman ; and with the assistance of the other seamen he tore up the ladder by which they had ascended, and planting it anew on the upper floor, the trap-door was thereby reached and opened. The roof, as is usual in the houses of Orientals, was perfectly flat, with very broad eaves ; thus affording protection from the bullets that began to whistle upwards from below the moment this new movement was discovered. The ladies, half-dead with terror at their approaching fate, were assisted up first. Then all the rest followed, and at once betook them to giving pot-shots at the head of any Moor that was visible from the lofty perch where they lurked.

Day was dawning now. The east towards Ceuta, and where the headland known as the Acho of El Minah stood grimly up, was pale with opal-tinted light, and rapidly it seemed to rise like a white mist from the ocean ; but in the west the stars were yet twinkling amid the blue expanse.

Fairway was gone ; but amid the excitement of the time, and the natural, earnest, and deep regret for his death—assassination it seemed—the pressing danger that menaced themselves drew them of a stern necessity from dwelling then on the event.

"I have just shot him Milly," said Stanley grimly, through his set teeth.

"Who?" she asked.

"The man in the scarlet fez—the scoundrel who killed Fairway.

"Ah, how dreadful all this is!" she moaned, with her arms round her pallid mother ; "what you must have felt when you saw him fall!"

"Felt!" repeated Stanley bitterly. "I felt but what I feel now—a fierce and merciless emotion to kill all, and spare not."

"Right, sir," cried one of the yachtsmen, "or they kill us.—Blaze away, lads; but always duck down after firing."

The effects of the flames below soon began to be felt, and the situation was becoming deplorable. The men all knew that, had the ladies not been with them, it would be a better fate to sally out and die fighting hand to hand, than to perish miserably by the most horrible and appalling of all deaths when the roof fell in, as ere long it must inevitably do; and some of the seamen were already whispering of this to each other.

The crackling of the wood, the awful odour of fire, and the volumes of smoke increased together. Ere long the latter began to roll darkly out of the lower windows and other apertures. A crisis in the fate of all was approaching fast, when suddenly they saw close at hand a body of Ben Hamo's Moorish cavalry, clad in short blue jackets with breeches and tarbooshes of scarlet, come galloping, with sabres brandished, through the grove of trees beside the khan, the assailants of which now fled in all directions. But many were overtaken and cut down, and very few were captured, for the succouring force were men of the Askar race, from the remote and wild regions of the interior—a race delighting in blood and slaughter, from which the Moorish army has been recently recruited. And long ere their work was over, the active and ready-handed seamen had begun the task of descending, by beating an opening into that portion of the khan which was not on fire, and getting the ladies safely down from story to story, after which they succeeded in extinguishing the flames; and thereby won the gratitude of the proprietor, to whom the kaid, or military commander of the province, had at once given the aid required, with all the better will as he had an interest in Gibraltar, having more than once had some lucrative contracts for certain supplies of cattle and flour for the garrison.

The aga or captain of the troop, was not an Askar, but a Moor of the purest type; but as he knew not a word of any language save his own, any intercourse between him and

those he had saved was of necessity very brief. His orders were from the kaid to escort the strangers in safety to their ship; so, after many hours of harassing excitement, it may readily be supposed that our friends lost no time in making their way to the yacht, bringing off with them as trophies several Moorish sabres and daggers, with half a dozen of those muskets for the manufacture of which Tetuan is ever celebrated, the barrels being formed by a bar of iron wound spirally round a mandrel and welded, and as the welding operation proceeds it is gradually drawn out. Stanley secured that which Ben Targa had handled, and found its lock, though a flint one, a rare specimen of workmanship.

The moment they were all on board the yacht, and the body of poor Fairway covered up and deposited in the long-boat amidships, the ensign was half hoisted, and preparations made for sea.

As for the idea of any protestation or government inquiry in these timid peace-at-any-price days, they never thought or cared about it. They had got clear off and were once more under the union-jack; that was enough, and much to be thankful for; however, as Neddy Knollys said, they should now have the horror of figuring melodramatically in illustrated papers, amid "drawings made on the spot," by some one who all the while was within sound of Westminster clock or the bell of St. Paul's.

"Jack Fortnum, uncork some moselle; by Jove, I feel "thirsty as a fish!" exclaimed the Master of Badenoch, on finding himself once more in the dainty *bijou* cabin of the *Wolf;* and the order seemed very acceptable to all the gentlemen of his party. As for the ladies, they had all retired to amend their toilets, which their recent adventures had somewhat disordered and dilapidated; and so utterly were the four exhausted by excitement, that it was evident but little would be had of their society till the yacht reached Gibraltar. Moreover, they were all undoubtedly looking ill and pale; and now Rimmel and Jean Vincent Bully's *vinaigre de toilette*, &c., were extensively resorted to, while the gentlemen betook them to iced wine or sundry brandies-and-sodas, and swearing roundly at those rascals, so many of whom they had left stark and stiff with their glazed eyes staring skyward.

Frank Fairway, ere he left the yacht, to be prepared for any emergency, and true to his old man-of-war training and instincts, had her hove pretty short on her cable with a spring upon it, keeping her broadside to the village, with her guns brought over to one side and shotted; the jib and flying jib roused out of their nettings ready for hoisting home, and the fore and aft mainsail loose in its brails to let fall. Thus she was soon ready for sea, and working out of the little bay into the straits in the evening sunshine.

"Thank Heaven we are on board again!" said Fanny to her husband, as she felt the cutter moving through the water.

"Life is too short for such affairs as we have been engaged in," said he laughing. "I should not have cared much if I had been alone; but with *you*, dearest Fanny, it certainly made a deuced difference."

Mrs. Allingham, completely overcome, remained in her cabin. But after a time Milly came on deck, and Stanley hastened to offer her his arm and lead her to a seat near the taffrail; and as he pressed her hand, she gave one or two almost convulsive sobs.

"What agitates you now?" he asked softly.

"Happiness and gratitude: happiness to find myself with you, and great gratitude to God for all our escapes," she replied earnestly, and then smiled.

The time they had been separated had developed in a more womanly way the graces Stanley had seen ripening in the girl; the liquid softness of her dark eyes, with their long lashes, was the same, but the somewhat haughty expression of brow and lip had passed away.

During the little voyage out, Milly — aware, of course, that Stanley was in garrison at Gibraltar—had often thought with a conscious blush on her cheek, of her first meeting with him, and of his surprise in finding her there; of their explanations and mutual greeting, the fashion in which they should take place, and so forth. But their perilous involvements, and this rescue from ruffians in a foreign land—in Morocco, in Africa—was an event altogether so unforeseen that it took the edge off the whole affair in one way, and yet put a keener edge upon it in another. So at last—at last—she was with

him whose love she really prized, and her coquetry with whom had led to all her and his sorrows.

They spoke long and earnestly, often passionately, and were silently happy, hand in hand, and sometimes cheek to cheek, after the twilight fell, and the shore of that blue but tideless sea receded from them.

"O Rowland love," said she, "it was indeed a strange destiny that brought you hither—brought you to *me* at a time so critical."

"Yes, Milly, it was destiny; what else? I came to meet you in your peril with that emotion which, as some one says, comes to us in a dream of the dead: 'We feel no surprise, we address them as those whom we expected and desired to meet;' and in this stunned sense, as if it was all confused and unreal, did I meet you, Milly."

After a time, he said:

"It was so good and kind of Fanny Conyers—Mrs Comyn I mean—to bring you out in the yacht when I could not get home."

"Yes, most kind, was it not?" said Milly, colouring, however, with the knowledge that the whole affair had been a little pet scheme of her own; "and I must own to you that I was most anxious that we should touch at Gibraltar; for though I *did* treat you ill in London and at Thaneshurst, you have ever been all goodness and truth to me."

"Yes, ever, Milly, ever!" replied Stanley, utterly oblivious of the proposal be had in—revenge, of course—made to the Senhora Maria de Vega at San Miguel.

Indeed to do him justice, we believe he had quite forgotten his sojourn in that sunny isle of oranges.

"Rowland, I thought you would never forgive me."

"For what, darling?"

"The affair of the white camellia. It looked so ill; and that we should never be as we are now, so happy. But *how* could you leave me, Rowland, as you did? Another moment might—nay, must—have explained all. How miserable I was! And then came the story of the shipwreck, and that well nigh killed me."

"Tears, Milly! Do not weep."

"Promise me that you will never, never——"

"Will leave you again?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Be jealous more."

"Never darling!"

Fortunately Bill the topman, who was at the wheel, was very much engaged in his steering and keeping the fore and aft mainsail full, otherwise he might have seen what he was not intended to see.

"That ball at Brighton——"

"Do not let us recall it, Rowland."

"Why?"

"It is painful."

"It has led to the happiest hour of my life, Milly."

"And mine; but all my after sorrow was the punishment of my pride in those days."

"And mine was the punishment of my pride, suspicion, and impetuosity, love," he added, laughing.

We have said they were often silent; but such silence is sweet and eloquent too. For "the reliance on unexpressed sympathy is the surest indication of intimacy having reached the stage when effort is needless; the harbour-bar is passed, and a haven of serene security attained."

The bright stars were out now, but the moon was yet below the chain of the Atlas Mountains. The breeze was fair and soft, and a sensation of luxury was imparted by the gentle roll of the cutter. The only light on deck was that from the binnacle, which glared redly on the embrowned visage and brawny throat of Bill the topman. The wake astern seemed a train of green sparks blended with white foam, while the dim and shifting shadows of the great boom mainsail and gaff topsail that tapered away aloft marked the outline of the canvas against the starlit sky.

How happy these two were on deck together, though certainly the memory of *who* lay dead, stark, and stiff, covered by a union jack, in the long-boat amidships, marred their emotions a little for the time.

Occasionally they heard voices from the cabin, where Joe Trevor, a sub., with a bright healthy English face browned by the sun of Bermuda and Gibraltar, and eyes that were the

index of a light and honest heart—a heart in the right place—was devoting himself to Fanny's sister, the younger Miss Conyers.

Long, long was the story that Stanley had to tell Milly of his adventures since their separation at Brighton; his voyage and his shipwreck, his sufferings and his tender yearnings all ended now, when he could lie on the deck at her feet, or sit by her side, hand clasped in hand, and eye bent on eye.

And Milly, seated on the deck with *him*, became as cheerful, as merry, and *riante* as if the whole horrible episode of that perilous expedition on shore, with all its accompaniments of musketry, death, and wounds, had been a day dream instead of a stern day reality—an episode of Moorish life she was never likely to forget. And when she smiled, on each of her pearl-white teeth a light, like a diamond, glittered on the pure enamel. And how fondly could they gaze into each other's eyes now, and never, never feel weary!

"Gibraltar lights are almost visible," said a voice beside them.

"Yes," said another. "Well, Oysterley of ours was a good sort to offer to take my guard for me; but I'll be back sooner than he expects. Old Mulligrubs, the staff-surgeon, didn't see my way to sick-leave, or I should have cut Gib., and been at Hampton Court by this time."

The Master of Badenoch and Neddy Knollys had come on deck to have a "quiet weed before turning-in; so now Milly Allingham retired to her cabin, and soon slept like

"A dove out-wearied with her flight,"

and when she awoke the cutter was moored, with all her canvas handed, under the giant shadow of the Rock of Gibraltar.

## CHAPTER LIX.

### WEDDING-BELLS.

"IN novels," says a writer, "the reader will find a hundred strange meetings and coincidences: old lovers coming face

to face after years of separation ; friends thought dead rising up at the corners of the streets; and good characters appearing to confound the bad. But real life has often, more than we imagine, its strange meetings and coincidences too." And in evidence of this, here we have Milly Allingham and Stanley together in Gibraltar.

But as there can be no pleasure in this world without some alloy, that of the engaged couple was marred, in one way, by a severe illness that came upon Mrs. Allingham, and confined her to her hotel ; an illness consequent on all she had undergone on the other side of the straits. As it was only extreme perturbation of the spirits and overtaxing of the nervous system, it passed away in time, amid such peace and rest as could be procured in that Babel of many tongues, strange noises, and incessant drumming and bugling; and as there are always four or five regiments of the line in Gibraltar, together with artillery and a numerous staff, Milly and her two friends looked forward to great gaiety.

Knollys had informed Joe Trevor of the relations between Stanley and Miss Allingham ; thus on parting with her at the hotel, he said,

"I have a very fair Collard in my quarters on Windmill Hill, and I hope to hear you and Rowland sing together."

"He has a good voice," replied Milly, colouring.

"A voice that would make his fortune—if—if——"

"If what, Mr. Trevor?"

"He had not made it already," replied Joe laughing.

"How?"

"In winning *you*. Excuse me, dear Miss Allingham ; but Rowland and I are old friends—I know all, and from my heart I congratulate you both."

And bowing very low, Joe marched off to the barracks, leaving Milly's face covered with a momentary blush.

Fairway was buried at the North Front, and, as he had been in her Majesty's navy, a party of Stanley's regiment fired over him. The Master of Badenoch was the chief mourner ; and Milly, from a place where she stood, could hear the three volleys waking the echoes of the mighty rock.

"Poor fellow—he loved me!" thought she. It was a bit of her old nature, after all.

And when the time came for attending to the interests of his old mother, then far away in pleasant Devonshire, they were not forgotten by the Master and by Rowland Stanley.

So now, for a time, the latter had Milly all to himself, and the hours of his daydreams in Gibraltar were actually realised when he and she wandered together in the rock-hewn halls or gun-galleries, watching the shipping in the straits or listening to the sounds in the town below, and of the billows breaking on the rocks. Daily they were there in his hours of leisure from military duty, rambling side by side, her hands clasped fondly on his arm, her face looking upward into his, her smile and touch seeming to infuse in every vein and nerve the ardour and enthusiasm of her own loving nature, while talking of the happier future that lay beyond the happy present, when they should stand together before an altar-rail, vowing to love and honour each other for life; and she could laugh more merrily than ever when her friend Fanny sang her old teasing song, "He thinks I do not love him;" for right well did Stanley know she "loved him now."

And with what genuine delight did he show her all the wonders of the castellated rock!—Gibraltar where the damp and hot, dull and dusty Levanter that had so nearly floored the *Wolf*, came sweeping through the straits; Gibraltar the queer and anomalous, where the British sign-boards hang side by side with those of Spaniards, Moslems, negroes, Jews, and Moors; where the kilted Highlander, the ruddy-faced Saxon linesman, the showy English nursemaid, the officer in blue undress or mufti, and the fashionable girls of the garrison, are all mingled together in the streets or Alameda, philandering under the aloes or date-trees; where sometimes the brightness of the sunshine would gladden the heart of a photographer; and where the Protestants worship God in a church fashioned like a Moorish mosque with horse-shoe arches. But he and she loved best to linger under the flowering scarlet aloes in the garden of the Alameda, or the ostrich-feather-like sprays of the pepper trees.

And many a gay riding party was organised for them by Knollys and Trevor, where, *viâ* Rondo, they would gallop as far as Granada—the Granada of Washington Irving's delightful tales.

A clever writer says that history may sometimes repeat itself, but the happiness in human lives never.

He would not have thought so had he seen our lovers together in old Gib. And now Stanley could show her in reality the old Moorish tower, the gate of Charles V., and all those places he had once sketched in the hope of showing them to her at home in England. Milly, we have said, in the earlier part of our story, was a well-read girl; thus she could 'get up' rather more than an ordinary young-ladylike enthusiasm concerning the great fortress, as she knew all about how in the eighth century five hundred Moors first landed there under Tarif Ebn Zarca, whose name was given to the mountain, which he held despite King Roderick and his Goths; how it was taken by a handful of English seamen in the days of the good Queen Anne, and valiantly defended against all the might of France and Spain by the "old Cock of the Rock" in the time of George III.

All Milly's perceptions were sharpened, and rendered more observant and acute, by the keen inspiration of love. It had always been necessary to her coquettish nature "to be the *first* object in some one's affection;" and now all the affection and love of her heart lay absorbed in the idea of Stanley.

In their lightness of heart they ultimately learned to laugh at what he called "the row over the way. How little could I imagine," said he, "when summoned, like the melodramatic seaman, to succour 'lovely woman in distress,' she was to be embodied in my own Milly!"

"And in Morocco, too!" she added.

"It does seem incredible; but truly there are more things in heaven and earth—you know the quotation, darling."

It was evident that there were a good many kisses on earth, as the sentry in the nearest battery might have seen; but he was intently watching—to all appearance—a sail off Al Kazar point.

We have said that, when on board the transport that bore them from Bermuda, Stanley and Knollys tossed, or drew

lots, for who was to enact the part of groomsman to the other, and that the latter won; so he was duly reminded of that circumstance, and had to enact that part (before his own affair could come off at home) in the church of Gibraltar, and in full puff—"his best bib and tucker," he called it; he was a groomsman to the life, with every joke appropriate to the occasion for the bride, the bridegroom, and the bridesmaids.

In such a place as Gibraltar we need scarcely say that the military element was a predominating one at the marriage, and the church was crowded by the officers and men of his regiment to "see Stanley of ours turned off," for he was an especial favourite with all ranks; and the beauty of the bride, who was given away by the general commanding—an old V.C., with as many wounds as wrinkles—drew a murmur of applause from all.

"The first few hours after the wedding-ring is on the finger are not the most cheerful ones to the most light-hearted fairy that ever fluttered from home to the arms of a stranger," says the author of *One-and-Twenty*. No doubt it is often thus; but it was not so in the case of Milly. There was so much military jollity in the whole affair—in the speeches, jokes, the wedding-breakfast, the clangour of the bells, the crashing of the band, who were tipped handsomely (and ever so many more to avoid the absurd "chairing" peculiar to some regiments), the cheers, the volleys of old shoes and hearty wishes that accompanied them on board the Southampton P. and O. liner, which had all her bunting flying in honour of the occasion; in short, so general was the hubbub—that, till she was in the seclusion of her own cabin, Milly had literally not time to think or to reflect that at last she, who that morning rose from bed Millicent Stanhope Allingham, "a spinster," was now the wedded wife of Rowland Stanley.

So, "in the mimic life which players on the stage show the world before it, the green curtain invariably falls on a scene akin to this—Corydon and Chloris hand in hand, and grey hairs blessing them. Thus ends the story; and the stage is cleared away for the ballet or the farce."

## CHAPTER LX.

### CONCLUSION.

THE following day saw the *Wolf of Badenoch* going, with a flowing sheet, before a stiff Levanter, out of the straits and bound for Cowes, with all its party, a little silent and moody after the festivities of yesterday, and Bill the topman's hands steady on the wheel as the Moorish walls and towns of Tarifa melted into ocean on her lee.

And now to look elsewhere.

Mabel's marriage was a fact; it could not be undone, so Mrs. Brooke had—in the end—to reconcile herself to the inevitable, and open her arms to her daughter and her daughter's husband, and welcome them together to Thaneshurst.

"Needs not to tell," as Scott would say, how all the household, from the butler to the "buttons," welcomed back Mabel, of whose sufferings and adventures none save her parents knew; or how, when Mrs. Brooke gave her fair fat hand, every finger of which was gemmed, to Tom, he took it kindly in his, and even kissed that lady's remarkably plump cheek, in a most son-in-law manner—a trifle frigidly, perhaps, at first. Well, he did not *owe her* much in the way of regard.

Once again Mabel saw the arbour in which she and Tom had sat on the night of their elopement, its clustering vines now tinted with the gorgeous hues of autumn, and the garden where, in happy childhood, she had pursued the butterflies and sunbeams; and now, when again she could bury her pretty face in the cool freshly-gathered roses, all her heartfelt yearnings in the old boarding-house at Harley Street were gratified.

When old Digweed went over the conservatory with her; when she went with old Pupkins through the stables; or when pretty Polly Plum dressed her hair ere she retired for the night to her old room, and prattled parish gossip at her back about the Rev. Alban Butterley or sleek Dr. Clavicle, it sometimes seemed to Mabel as if she had never been out of Thaneshurst at all; only she knew that Tom Seymour

was her husband, and would come to her anon, when he had finished his last cigar on the terrace without, or in the smoking-room with papa.

"There be trees and flowers as may be transplanted safely; but there be some as won't be transplanted, and grow only in their old soil; and I think you be the same as one of these, Missie Mabel," said the old gardener, for, though a wedded wife, to him she was Missie Mabel still.

Again, with Tom, she could rush her horse through wooded Stanmer Park, or scamper over the breezy and grassy South Downs, and see the Ouse winding away towards Newhaven. Again they rode through the lane where, as it was supposed, Tom's horse threw him, and Mabel's secret escaped her in her sorrow and alarm.

Reconciled to her mother, forgiven fully by her father, Mabel's happiness would have been complete but for one most unavailing regret.

Oh, had baby been spared to her! Amid all her pleasure there was the memory of that calamity, with the dread that she had been unable to procure the most efficient medical aid. But in due time other babies came, babies that got sponsorial mugs and gold-mounted corals—to replace the one that had been borne away in its cheap little coffin from that house in Harley Street.

Mr. Brooke's settlement on the young couple was a handsome one. Mabel had 50,000*l.* "down on the nail," as he said, settled upon herself and her children after her, with mighty prospects for them all in the future; and often, in the time to come, when again in Tyburnia, when riding or driving in the Row with a fifty-guinea tiger-skin over her knees and a pet dog reposing in the book-basket, or it might be when seated on the horsey Val Reynolds's drag in June, when the Four-in-Hand Club come forth in all their glory, with their time-honoured brown coats, brass buttons, and buff waistcoats, she looked back with amazement and wonder to the days of the dull boarding-house, and the more sordid dwelling for which she had to quit it. But prosperity never changed the sweetness of Mabel's nature.

But poetical justice attended the career of Alfred Foxley, who, like the man in the farce, came down "from sunshine

and champagne, to clouds and bottled porter," and often failed to get even that.

After a time he returned to London under an assumed name, and in the desperation of his circumstances was glad to become a billiard-marker, and then a super at the same theatre in which was performing the fair Aimée, who as he could no longer supply her extravagance, threw him over at once for some one else.

At times he won a trifle on a Derby favourite; but often, when he had spent all his own money, and the money of any one else who was weak enough to trust him, he was actually without food, and he would loaf about the streets till his night duties came at the theatre, aware all the time that *she* on whom he had spent so much in the days of his prosperity was away on the river with Larkspur, to whom she was said to be married—away sometimes for a week's voyage up Oxford way, where the sylvan banks were overhung by the foliage of June, and were fringed with luscious meadow-sweet, where the black water-fowl scuttled in the reedy reaches, and the green woods stretched for miles. He thought of this and the luxuries they enjoyed together—luxuries such as *he* had once shared with her; and as he buttoned his threadbare coat to hide his lack of shirt-front the conviction maddened him, for he loved Aimée as much as it was possible for his selfish heart to love any one beyond himself.

What made him the more savage was that she made no concealment of the fact that he had been completely supplanted, and that Larkspur had become the god of her idolatry.

"Well, well," Alf would mutter, with an execration, "these things don't last for ever, and I don't envy *him* his bargain."

But in all this we are somewhat anticipating.

On their marriage tour, Milly and Stanley, before going to Connaught Place, were to go to Thaneshurst for the Christmas festivities, as a letter from Mabel informed them. The Master of Badenoch and Fanny, "little Dimples," and every one else she cared for, had been invited too; so the time bade fair to be a most joyful one.

As soon as he could get leave for England from the colonel, Neddy Knollys lost no time in making his way to Hampton Court, where his pretty cousin Kate awaited him in all the bloom of her widowhood; and he,—as he wrote,—after assuring himself that old Hippisley was this time indeed defunct, was not long in following his gay friend Rowland Stanley "from the sunshine of love into the night of matrimony."

THE END.

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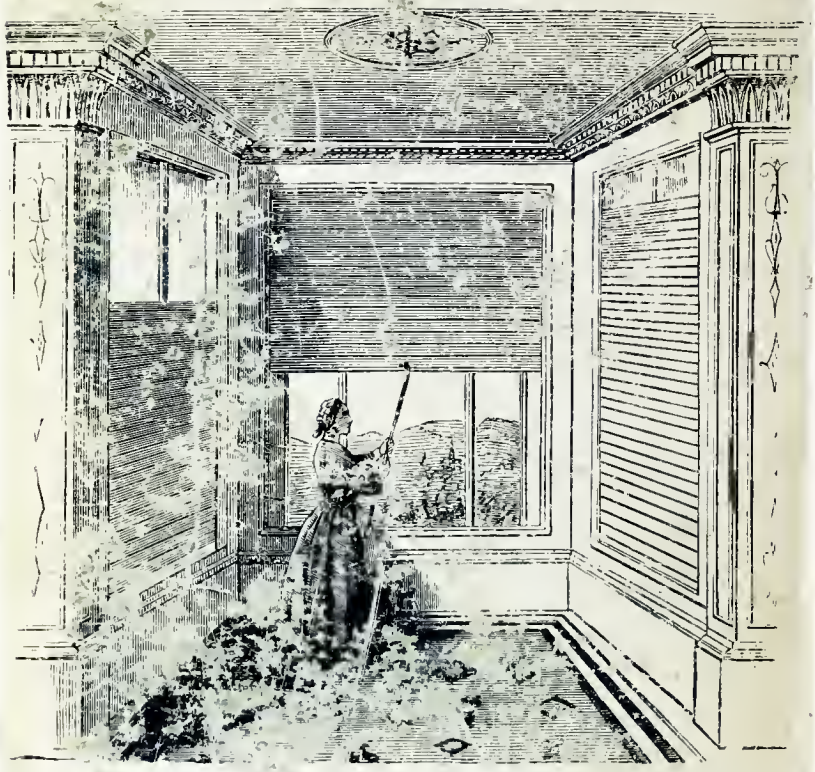

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